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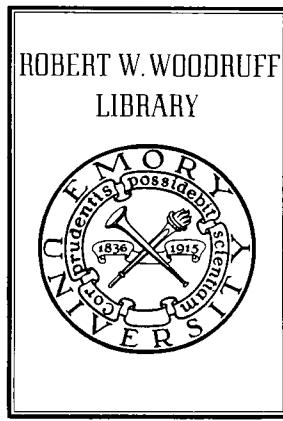
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THE
DUCHESS OF BURGUNDY;

OR,

SCENES IN THE COURT OF LOUIS XIV.,

IN THE TIME OF

CARDINALS RICHELIEU AND MAZARIN.

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THE DUCHESS OF BURGUNDY.

CHAPTER I.

THE STEPMOTHER'S PROJECT.

IN the delightful month of April, on a serene and beautiful evening, a young lady of the Court was listening with attentive ear to Madame de Maintenon, who was reading a letter to her which she had just written.

The apartment in which she was seated was remarkable for its elegant simplicity, and the good taste displayed in its arrangements. It was hung with green damask relieved with gold ; the lofty windows opened to the park ; between the chimney and a handsome glass book-case might be seen *un prie-dieu* at the foot of a crucifix. This was the chamber of Madame de Maintenon.

After hearing the letter read, the young lady requested to be allowed to seal it herself, and her *tante* granted the prayer with a smile. Reader, thou shalt see this letter, of which we have not changed one word ; it was addressed to the Duke de Richelieu—

“I AM delighted, my dear duke, to have to inform you that the Duke de Fronsac succeeds wonderfully well. Never did young man make a more agreeable entry into the world ; he pleases the King and is the delight of the

Court ; everything that he attempts is well done ; he dances elegantly, on horseback he is a model ; he is polite, and neither too timid, nor too forward, and though abounding in wit and repartee, he does not forget respect, but converses well. In short, he seems to want for nothing—almost perfection—and as yet I find no fault in him. I experience sincere pleasure in listening to his praises, and to have it in my power to send you such an agreeable account. You will believe all I have said, my lord, for you know that I am no flatterer. *The Duchess of Burgundy seems to be greatly struck, and to have taken a lively interest in the fate of your son.* I sent to request that he would pay me a visit yesterday, and I was delighted with all I saw of him—really he is quite a prodigy. Allow me sincerely to congratulate you, my dear duke, and believe me that no one desires a continuance of your happiness more than I—

‘MAINTENON.’

‘Really, *ma tante*,’ said the young lady, as she placed the richly cut seal upon the Spanish wax, ‘the Duke de Fronsac loses nothing by your description of him ; but certainly the young man is greatly devoted to you.’

Madame de Maintenon pulled her bell, a valet appeared, and the letter was despatched.

‘Do not you think that our projects for Marly are charming, *tante* ? I think they will be delightful, and very amusing—these *petites soirées* will enliven the king. Don’t you think he has looked very pale for the last few days ? I am almost afraid to give breath to my fears ; he attends too closely to the state of affairs with M. de Pontchartrain. *Ma tante*, shall we not perform some plays at Marly ?’

Madame de Maintenon, who appeared to be busy in seeking for some papers in her portfolio, replied with an absent air—

‘You know very well, my dear duchess, that the king will not allow it. However, there will be balls; we shall have lotteries, cards, dice, but no deep play. De Brissac, De Nangis, and others, set a bad example this last winter. But would you believe it, my dear duchess, only yesterday I surprised the young Duke de Fronsac betting heavily upon a single card.’

‘*Mon Dieu!* he might have been better occupied.’

‘So said the king.’

‘Does his majesty often address him?’

‘Certainly—he is quite a favourite—he is amused with his unaffected and witty replies.’

‘I suppose you heard what he said yesterday?’

‘No—what was it, dear duchess?’

‘A few young people were assembled at my house to practise some new steps. De Fronsac arrived, and I heard some railleries, of which he was the subject. Some of our young fops, leaders of fashion, laughed at the cut of his coat, and De Fronsac, turning upon them with one of his most wicked glances, said—

‘Ay, look! Very elegant, and will be all the rage! Its name—a *stepmother*!’

‘This will not have a very amusing sound in the ears of the Duchess de Richelieu?’

‘May be not, but perhaps it may correct her ridiculous economy.’

‘My dear, the Duchess de Richelieu has doubtless a strong affection for her husband’s son, and you know she appears to have as much anxiety for him as if he were her

own son. And she has communicated a project to me which shows that she has at least an excellent heart.'

'Indeed, *tante*, and what may that be?' inquired the young duchess.

'*Mon Dieu!* I will tell you, and you must second us, for I am a little interested in this affair. You are partial to De Fronsac; nothing could be more fortunate, and—'

'Really, I do not understand you.'

'Well, *madame*, if I must speak out, we wish the young duke to marry.'

'What, *tante*! At his age—at sixteen?'

'And why not? Perhaps you may reply, there is a time for all things—ay, but at sixteen! Why it seems as if all you ladies had got into your heads that he is yet a marmot, of no consequence. But his stepmother and the Duke de Richelieu think otherwise. Fronsac is one of those wild colts whom it is necessary to break whilst his mouth is tender, or he will ever disdain the bit.'

'And whom may his kind and attentive stepmother have destined for him?'

'My dear duchess, that is a question that I do not feel quite at liberty to answer.'

'Never mind, *tante*, I will guess; the stepmother wishes him to marry Mademoiselle de Noailles, her own daughter. Doubtless a good match! De Fronsac will in her have a fine woman, with a charming disposition! And will the king consent to this?'

Madame de Maintenon felt it her duty to keep silent. She cast a rapid glance upon the duchess, and appeared struck by her animated looks, for her colour changed alternately from the lily to the rose. The *tante*, whose eye sparkled with penetration, saw what she could never have

supposed, that Madame the Duchess of Burgundy, wife to the grandson of Louis XIV., had an evident partiality for the young Duke of Fronsac, this spoiled child of the Court. She regretted the letter she had written, and she thought it prudent to change the conversation, as a gentleman of the chamber entered, to announce the coming of the king.

In his seventy-second year, Louis XIV was one of the handsomest old men of the time. His features, naturally grave, had now taken an expression of melancholy, which the old king rarely endeavoured to disguise.

His general appearance had yet lost nothing of its imposing vivacity ; when he walked it was with slow, stately, majestic step ; probably he began to be sensible of a growing weakness in his limbs, and was fearful of making a false step. His shoulders alone betrayed the old man, for they had already began to stoop a little : and his sumptuous flowing robes of velvet could not hide his gradually decaying strength.

The king carried in his hand a long, gold-mounted cane ; and upon entering the apartment of Madame de Maintenon he took off his hat. The youthful Duchess of Burgundy, as was her usual custom, flew to meet him, saluting her grandpapa with a sprightly gracefulness, which never failed to delight Louis XIV

He fondly kissed her forehead, and a smile lurked upon his lips ; the lively, childish sallies of his granddaughter had now alone the power of lighting up his careworn features with a demi-smile.

Madame de Maintenon saluted the king as if at a presentation, and touched a fauteuil, as if with the purpose of placing it for him ; this Louis would not allow, but hasted

to seat himself, and then dismissed the gentleman in waiting who had accompanied him.

The Duchess of Burgundy would also have retired, but a sign from Madame de Maintenon retained her; the king was gloomy, and she might amuse him.

‘My daughter,’ said Louis, taking her by both her hands and contemplating her with an affectionate, but thoughtful look.

The young duchess seated herself on a *tabouret* of velvet at the feet of her grandfather, and her charming head reposed upon the knees of the old man, looking archly into his face to provoke him to smile.

Madame de Maintenon sat anxiously waiting for a word to be addressed to her, but the king in his moody temper did not attend to her.

‘Grandpapa,’ said suddenly the young duchess, in the softest tones of her mellifluous voice, ‘you have promised us to go to Marly.’

‘Yes, my child,’ replied Louis. ‘Madame has already announced this to many persons’—and thus saying, he was evidently speaking of Madame de Maintenon—but let it be understood that I wish for nothing in the way of a *fête*.’

‘Then, my dear grandpapa, of what use are the rehearsals of the darling new minuet?’ cried the duchess, caressing the king’s knees.

‘A ball! another ball! ’

‘Only a mere family ball, sire,’ ventured Madame Maintenon; ‘the members of your own family, but including the ladies of the Duchess of Burgundy, and the Duchess of Berry, the Duke of Bourbon, the Prince of Conti, and a few other young noblemen who have the entry to the *petits appartements*.’

‘Very good, very good, they shall not be disappointed, they shall have their dance,’ said the indulgent old king.

Near the fauteuil upon which Louis XIV. was seated stood a table covered with crimson velvet, upon which was laid some papers. The king stretched forth his hand as if to recommence some of his labours of the former night, and seized a little geographical chart, which he surveyed with an angry look. It was a map of the Rhine. The king’s frown became more deep ; the Duchess of Burgundy and Madame de Maintenon well knew the cause of his irritated feelings, and by the twitch of a light finger the obnoxious chart changed hands, and the lively lady looked at her grandfather with one of her arch smiles.

‘Madame !’ said the king rather seriously, and then continued in a softened tone, ‘My daughter !’

‘Sire, you are our king,’ said the duchess, ‘nay more, you are the most amiable and indulgent of fathers, and I am sure grandpa will listen to me for a few moments ?’

‘Well, child, well, you do what you will with me ; but out with it. What hast thou got to say ?’

‘Dearest grandpa, just to ask one single question—is it your wish, just now, that all the world should marry ?’

‘Have you lost your senses, child ?’

‘No, not I,’ said the duchess, ‘but only think of their wishing to marry such a young scapegrace as the Duke de Fronsac ! Would it not be wise to put a stop to it ? or, will they seek for wives for the pages of the king, for those of the dauphin, for mine, for all hare-brained children of the court ?’

At these words Madame de Maintenon blushed, and became pale again almost at the same moment.

‘By St. Dennis I believe she is right ! What is your

opinion, madame ?' said the king, addressing himself to Madame de Maintenon.

Thus appealed to, she put on an air of dignified sadness, which she knew the king could not withstand, and which she always assumed when she wished to carry a point, for it rarely failed in procuring her the victory. Madame at sixty-nine had still claims to beauty ; her excessive palleness only made her more interesting, her features had an undefinable expression ; at times her eyes were elevated towards heaven, like those of the blessed, or cast upon the ground with an air of resignation. The king now appeared to question those eyes, not knowing what to think of the lively interest which the Duchess of Burgundy appeared to take in the fate of the young Duke de Fronsac, whose wild pranks were only as yet considered, in the eyes of the Court, as the mad sallies of youth. Madame de Maintenon remained silent. Louis could read nothing upon her countenance, and impatient to have this apparent mystery explained, the king suddenly let fall the hand of the young duchess, which was clasped in his, became more serious, and again looked at madame, at the same time saying to the duchess—

‘ It is of little consequence or moment to me, my daughter, what they do, or do not do, to this little Fronsac. I pray you do not trouble me with these childish affairs, I have other and more weighty matters to occupy me.’

The young duchess arose, and curtsied to Madame de Maintenon, as if to cede to her the vantage ground ; then turning to the king she made a dignified reverence, and left the apartment of the favourite.

Louis XIV seized upon some of the papers which were spread upon the table, as the door closed upon the parting

footsteps of the duchess, and this door remained closed until the evening was far advanced.

Those whose office it was to attend upon the *coucher* of the king declared that they had never seen him in a more irritable humour. He was heard to express some very severe remarks upon the subject of certain young gentlemen who were audaciously presumptive, and of whom he menaced, sooner or later, to make a terrible example.

CHAPTER II.

THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT.

THE Maréchale, Duchess of Noailles, possessed near to St. Germain a charming habitation, which was called the *Ménagerie*. This widow of the maréchal was a first-rate woman, both in heart and mind. She might be fifty, but she was still lively and charming ; yet, when occasion called for it, she was not found wanting either in firmness or dignity. Her friendship was warm, her conversation delightful and insinuating, but always sincere. She lived at St. Germain nearly the entire year, visiting Versailles but upon particular occasions, when etiquette or duty compelled her to do so ; for, to her, Versailles was now only a place of sad remembrances—for had not the maréchal been the intimate friend and confidant of Queen Marie-Thérèse d'Autriche, Infante d'Espagne, the glorious and always honoured, though often forsaken, spouse of Louis XIV. ? The elegant house of the Duchess of Noailles, situated in the forest of St. Germain, was the rendezvous of the young Court. Some women of ardent and poetic mind, but of a thoughtful turn, came hither to refresh themselves from the somewhat sombre and severe Court of Versailles.

The maréchale recalled the past with inimitable grace ; her recollections and histories of her former splendid days bore a resemblance to the marvellous tales which one finds it difficult to credit, yet which are delightful to read. She

had a fine fortune, many friends, was reasonably pious, amiable, and conciliating, of an enlightened mind, and determined to judge things with her own eyes—in short, she lived an independent life.

But Madame de Maintenon was not enamoured of her. Why? Perhaps she was not supple enough to be played, like the other puppets, with a string.

The sun was about to disappear behind the gigantic masses of the forest trees—a breeze played amongst the young leaves of the poplars and maples—the birds of April saluted the evening with their last harmonious song—the forest was embalmed with the enchanting odours of the spring, which recall so many poetic recollections, when a cavalier traversed, at a rapid trot, these long alleys, already becoming dusky in the thickening gloom; he had avoided the common route through the forest, not wishing to pass through St. Germain to arrive at this house, termed the *Ménagerie*. He was followed by a single valet. Their horses were in a foam of sweat. The cavalier wore immense boots of chamois leather, a green riding dress embroidered with gold; at his side hung a splendid *couteau de chasse*, and a grey hat, ornamented with plumes of scarlet, waved gracefully from his head; he was youthful and his figure was elegantly formed—he managed his horse with skill, but so ardent, that he forgot the entire world when in pursuit of a favourite idea. He was the son of the Duke de Richelieu—the young, thoughtless, giddy Duke de Fronsac.

He was posting in all haste to see the maréchale, who was cousin-german to his stepmother—formerly the Marquise de Noailles.

Scarcely had he arrived at the entrance of the house

when he flung himself from his smoking steed, and abandoned him to the care of his valet, while the domestics flew to announce him. The maréchale sent to request him to wait for a few moments in a saloon, which looked towards the park. Fronsac paced the apartment with impatient tramp, making his spurs ring upon the inlaid floor, until the Duchess de Noailles appeared.

‘Ah! Madame la Maréchale!’ cried Fronsac, kissing her hand, ‘my dearest madame! ’

And he appeared to be so overcome with some inward feelings that for some moments he could not articulate more.

‘Well, my lord duke, well, what is the matter with you now? out of breath, quite convulsed? Will you not be at the *fêtes* at Marly? Why, how now? have you missed your aim at some pheasant this morning? If you are still in life I pray you to answer me.’

‘Do not make game of me, madame; alas! I am too miserable.’

‘How, my dear duke! you miserable?’

‘Alas! even so—and you do not know the cause? Madame de Richelieu, your cousin, has she told you nothing?’

‘Yes—she wishes to marry you to her daughter, Mademoiselle de Noailles, and you choose to raise objections. You see, I know all.’

‘Heavens! madame, how light a matter you make of it!’

‘Why, what would you have me to say? You have refused, and you have done well.’

‘Good heavens! but my father!’

‘Bah! he has grumbled all his life. You are too young for marriage shackles.’

‘But the king, my dear duchess?’

‘ He is really fond of you, and do not be afraid to speak to him.’

‘ And the Maintenon ? ’

‘ Does she meddle in the matter ? That is another affair, much more serious, and I begin to pity you ; but, my dear Fronsac, are they all become mad at Versailles ? What have you done to them ? ’

‘ Me, my dear duchess ? nothing, positively nothing. I am as gentle, mild, and submissive as a lamb. I make my court, I dance, I play, say everything that comes uppermost, and by way of making myself agreeable would almost submit to be quartered. They feast me, embrace me, and say that they love me, and now they would place me in chains, make a sedate husband of me, and expect me to become a sombre, family man—not yet sixteen ! Only just entering into the world, think of that. It is atrocious ! odious ! it is enough to make one lose one’s senses, or take refuge in a cloister. I will go, madame—yes, I would a thousand times rather fly into Flanders, and be blown from the mouth of the enemy’s cannon. I have no hope left but you—you are my counsel, my fate. Oh ! you will protect me, will you not, dearest duchess ? ’

The Duchess of Noailles was greatly affected, and looked at him with compassion, mixed with inoffensive gaiety. Taking his hand, she said—

‘ My dear duke, you are doubtless guilty.’

‘ Guilty ! How, madame ? ’

‘ How, indeed—you make all the ladies madly in love with you, and then you innocently inquire, how ? ’

‘ Why, my dear madame,’ exclaimed Fronsac, smiling, though with affected anger, ‘ is it my fault if they are in love with me ? —is it a crime of *lèse majesté* if I reply to

their gazes and provocations ? I arrive and they make me the fashion. I am invited, feasted, and they all appear to be enchanted to break the monotony of the sombre court by the follies of a simple youth like me. They have urged me on to dare everything, and they call me *pauvre aimable propre aux amusements enfantins*; I allow them to pamper me—to twine their arms around me, and to kiss me if they feel inclined ; they receive me at all hours. I am made much of, cherished, spoiled—and in the midst of all these pleasures, the thunder falls upon my head in an announcement of my marriage—but I would rather be buried alive in the Bastille !'

'What is that you are saying, my dear Fronsac ?—you really make me tremble. I have only one counsel to give you, and that is, to calm yourself, to be prudent, and perhaps it would be advisable that you should disappear for a short period.'

'Gracious powers ! quit Versailles ?' cried the youth in despair ; 'what, my friend, would you have the cruelty to banish me from Versailles ?'

The maréchale at this moment felt a convulsive vibration in the hand of the young Fronsac, which she still continued to hold ; she quickly divined the cause, but without appearing to notice it she replied—

'Banish you from Versailles—yes, my dear duke ; you are old for your age—this has not been taken into consideration at first, and it was a great error. The *pauvre aimable* has mind, soul, and very effervescent passions ; take my advice, quit the Court, and demand service.'

The Duke de Fronsac cast down his eyes and sighed profoundly, then suddenly quitting his seat near to the maréchale, he went and placed himself near to the glass

door which looked towards the park. Thoughtful, with his arms crossed, he contemplated the soft light of the moon, which illuminated the wavy forest.

The Duchess de Noailles continued to converse with him in a friendly tone, and Fronsac listened to the words which fell upon his ear like soft music, which, although it may not cure, for a moment charms away pain.

The good duchess consoled, and by degrees reanimated him, but unfortunately she pronounced too soon a name of which she knew not the electric power over the heart and soul of the young duke.

It made him tremble, and turning from the doorway, he began to pace the saloon with rapid step.

Madame de Noailles, still seated, continued her gentle remonstrances, and what was her astonishment when she beheld Fronsac place his hand upon his forehead and exclaim in despair—

‘Never, madame, never will I quit her—let the worst come, I will await it sword in hand—dungeons, tortures, death, all is now alike to me.’

‘Unfortunate young man, I pray you be silent ; if any curious ear should have overheard you—’

‘Well, well, let them denounce me ; I am tired of life, and he who will take it will render me a great service.’

‘For heaven’s sake, duke, silence !’ said the duchess, flying to him, and attempting to stop his mouth ; ‘the Duchess of Burgundy is here.’

Scarcely were the words pronounced, when a young female appeared at the entrance of the door, who came forward with majestic pace, and seated herself upon a *canapé*.

‘Well, maréchale, you have had time to say much to Monsieur de Fronsac, since you forgot me in your apartment. It is true that I gave you half an hour. Pray, duke, what is the news from Paris? Have you heard of any new pranks of the intimate friends of the Duke of Orleans? How is the little Abbé Dubois? Is there nothing pleasant with which one can amuse the king?—but you do not reply. Have you made a vow of silence. Nay, but that would be a pity, sir.’

Fronsac was greatly troubled at first by this beautiful apparition, but soon recovered his habitual ease, for he was endowed with an admirable presence of mind, and a suppleness of character which evidently was subservient to his will; his fiery passions were like those of a generous-spirited horse, whose mouth he knew, and which he could suddenly arrest, even in the face of a precipice.

He seated himself near to the Duchess of Burgundy, and all at once he became calm, smiling, lively in his conversation, recounting a thousand charming nothings, which came obedient to his call, but to which he gave all the effect of a lively and brilliant phantasmagoria.

The ladies joined in the laugh, and were greatly delighted and entertained.

The lively and elegant conversation bounded from one object to another, taking a thousand fanciful flights. Is this agreeable art of chatting lost? Is the delightful art flown to the other world with *la belle* society of France; and is there now no corner of the earth where one can go to study the elegant traditions of the past, the flowers of poesy, whilst the ponderous reality of the present day threatens to stifle us under its leaden hand?

The little saloon of the Duchess of Noailles was lighted

with wax tapers, and by the moon, which fringed with silver the draperies through the open glass door.

From the garden there came a breeze perfumed with roses and woodbines ; all was soft and smiling without, and the nightingale in liquid notes poured out her mysterious song.

The pleasant episodes of the Duke of Fronsac still continued. Paris was the magic cavern from whence he evoked all his visions. Never had the Duchess of Burgundy appeared to him so beautiful, so familiar, so amiable. She did not attempt to dissemble her pleasure at passing so agreeable an evening ; she called it the good fortune of chance to snatch some moments from the long hours devoted to tiresome etiquette, or ostentatious parade.

Fronsac would never have wearied of seeing the princess thus affable, simple, and gracious, like an affectionate cousin. And as to the maréchale, her feeling of pleasure would have been complete if a certain degree of apprehension had not gained upon her in spite of herself.

The Duchess of Burgundy appeared quite to have forgotten that she would be expected to be in the presence of the king at eleven o'clock, that it was now near to nine, and that St. Germain was four leagues from Versailles. But they were so gay in the saloon that time rolled on unheeded.

There are occasions when pleasure places danger in a false light, and drags its votary to the edge of the precipice.

One of the attendants of the maréchale entered ; and this man said something to his mistress in a low tone, which the others did not hear, and the maréchale instantly arose with precipitation, forgetting to request the permis-

sion of the Duchess of Burgundy to quit her; but she, catching hold of her robe, exclaimed,—‘Whither in such haste, maréchale?’

‘Madame,’ replied the Duchess de Noailles, ‘it is a message from the king,’ and she went out to see the messenger. The Duchess of Burgundy became pale and serious; her visit to the maréchale this evening was a secret at Versailles—the Duke of Burgundy himself was ignorant of it. The duchess cast her eyes upon De Fronsac, as she considered in what perfidious manner the prudes, the wicked, and the busy fools, would construe this meeting. The danger which the maréchale ran, the odious suspicions which might fall upon her, all these thoughts frightened the young duchess to such a degree that Fronsac ran to seek some ethereal essence, and presented it to her. At this moment she had a nervous crisis. Her beauteous eyes were suffused, and her cheeks pale as chiselled alabaster. Fronsac dared not to ring for assistance, for she forbade it by a rapid motion of her hand; he supported the cushion upon which drooped her head, and ventured to take her hand, but not a word was exchanged; in short, words at this moment would have been impossible. Fortunately, a fresh breeze coming in from the garden reanimated the spirits of the charming duchess—she made a sign that she wished to go into the open air, and Fronsac assisted her to rise, and then gave her his arm. She leaned for support upon it, and then began to walk at a slow pace. The moonlight was magnificent, and her silver rays plunged into the deep mass of verdure, and of flowers. There was an inexpressible charm in following these streams of silver light, which illuminated the gloomy alleys of this venerable forest.

Fronsac sustained, with lively palpitations of the heart, the pressure of the most beautiful arm in the world. First, they walked in a miniature alley of roses, then they left it for another. They visited the chesnut grove, also the squares of plants and flowers ; and they finished a tour of the garden with a firmer step and less agitated mind.

‘Madame,’ said Fronsac, in one of his softest tones, ‘the air has been of great service to you, thanks to this delightful promenade, which I shall never forget as long as I live.’

‘Perhaps it would be better, monsieur duke, that you should forget it to-morrow.’

‘How better, madame ? on the contrary, I should think that a crime. I could not be so ungrateful to my kind star. To meet so far from Versailles so beautiful an apparition as that which I have beheld, is happiness not to be met with in days, or years—’

‘We shall probably see each other frequently ; the king is well disposed towards you—he admires, and has already distinguished you, sir. If I do not deceive myself you will attain to high honours—are you not very ambitious ?’

‘Even to rashness, madame. Sometimes I alarm myself at aspiring so high ; but fate hurries me on, and methinks there is something grand and sublime in the thought of being struck to the earth by the red thunderbolt of heaven.’

‘You are a young enthusiast, duke ; but take care that this does not injure your plans of ambition.’

‘My plans ? You are laughing at me, madame ; a mad cap like me—whose ardent soul is——me form plans !’

At this moment they were passing a bank of roses, Fronsac stooped, and pulled one that was fully blown, and then cast it from him, strewing the sand with its leaves.

‘Such are my calculations, my plans,’ said Fronsac. ‘Well, let it be with my life, as with these dispersed leaves—of what import to me, so that my ardent adoration survives all. You, madame, will not understand this. You are too elevated—above all passion.’

The Duchess of Burgundy bowed her head, but did not reply; only when Fronsac implored her pardon if his thoughtless language had displeased her, he felt that the pardon was graciously accorded, by a gentle pressure from the most beautiful of arms upon his, and delirious with joy, he kneeled upon the ground before the lady of his adoration, and calling the bright stars which shone over their heads to witness his homage, he devoted to her his life, his soul—’

‘Rise, Fronsac, rise!’ said the melodious voice of her he loved. ‘The sincere heart requires no oath to keep its faith.’

Fronsac raised her little hand, pressed it to his heart, and then respectfully pressed it to his lips. The duchess returned towards the house, and they entered once more the saloon of Madame de Noailles, who at the same moment came in by the opposite door from her interview with the king’s messenger.

Her countenance wore an expression of sadness which contrasted strangely with the two youthful beings before her; she held a paper in her hand, which she seemed to eye with alarm.

‘My dearest maréchale,’ said the duchess, ‘what is the matter—what has happened

The Duchess de Noailles sank upon a chair, and then said with lively emotion—

‘Dear duke, my dear young friend—arm yourself with

courage ; you have now no chance of escape or resistance,
the king will have it so.'

Then she gave the paper into the hands of the Duchess of Burgundy, who seemed to devour it with her eyes.

It was a contract of marriage between the Duke de Fronsac and Mademoiselle de Noailles, daughter of the Duchess de Richelieu. The contract by the parents, by Mademoiselle de Noailles, and by Louis XIV. And the king had sent it to the Maréchale de Noailles, with orders to her to see it signed by Fronsac, whom he knew was to be with her that evening.

It had been brought by Monsieur de St. Olon, a gentleman of the bed-chamber, who had ridden express with it from Versailles. He was now waiting in the next apartment, until the contract was signed, and then his orders were to carry it back instanter to the king.

Fronsac remained speechless, like one that was thunderstruck ; the good maréchale wept ; the Duchess of Burgundy was deadly pale, but with a grave step she advanced towards a table, upon which stood pens and ink—with trembling hand she laid the contract of marriage upon the table. Then, approaching Fronsac, she held out her hand to him and said—

‘Come, my dear duke ; nay, then, for my sake.’

Fronsac looked up, and met the celestial regards of the beautiful duchess ; he bowed to her as to his guardian angel, and taking up a pen he signed the contract.

‘Madame,’ said the Duchess of Burgundy to the maréchale, ‘now let the messenger approach.’

St. Olon was introduced ; when he saw the Duchess of Burgundy he started back with astonishment.

‘Monsieur,’ said she, addressing him, ‘here is the con-

tract of marriage ; the Duke de Fronsac has signed it ; I will also add my signature' (which the duchess instantly did). ' You will say to the king, sir, that you found me here at the house of Madame la Maréchale, and you will not fail to speak of the ready obedience of the Duke of Fronsac.'

The gentleman of the bed-chamber respectfully took charge of the contract, and he requested the Duchess of Burgundy to allow him to have the honour of escorting her carriage to Versailles.

The duchess graciously accepted his offer, and taking leave of her two friends she entered alone into her carriage, which was drawn by six horses, and proceeded at full gallop towards Versailles.

CHAPTER III.

A SUPPER AT THE PALAIS ROYAL.

The deep-toned bell of Notre Dame had told the eleventh hour of night. The sky was gloomy, and dark masses of stormy clouds hung over the City of Paris, and proclaimed a coming storm.

The Duke de Fronsac urged on his generous steed. He approached the gate of St. Honoré ; there he slackened his pace ; he had reasons for not wishing to reach his home at too early an hour. Suddenly he heard behind him a noise as if a body of cavalry was rapidly approaching ; he drew to one side, caring very little whom it might be.

First came some pikemen, others followed with flaring torches of resin, then a carriage surrounded with guards. All the inhabitants of the Rue St. Honoré were at their windows.

The Duke de Fronsac had evidently been recognised, for several of the guards hastily wheeled about, returned, and surrounded him. In the first moment of surprise the young duke drew his sword—it was a mere *couteau de chasse* ; but the officer who commanded the party, with his hat in his hand, said—

‘ My lord duke, may I request of you to approach the carriage ? ’

The equipage and guards had halted ; a figure was seen thrusting its grimacing features from the carriage door, and

a voice was heard to exclaim in sharp tones to the guards—

‘Bring him hither—bring him hither !’

Fronsac, by the sharp voice and impudent tone issuing from an ape’s visage, recognised the pert little Abbé Dubois.

He was in the carriage of the Duke of Orleans, with this prince, who was returning from St. Cloud.

‘*Parbleu !*’ exclaimed the prince, ‘is it really you ? How fortunate ; you are my prisoner, so surrender, and come and take your supper with us at the Palais Royal.’

‘My lord,’ said Fronsac, still offering a show of resistance ; ‘I am really truly concerned, but ——’

‘Ah, duke, will you compel me to use force ?’ at the same moment ordering the opening of the carriage door.

Four or five of the guards dismounted, and Fronsac was seized and out of his saddle before he had time to make any resistance.

The Duke of Orleans received him into his carriage which instantly proceeded. The little abbé roared with laughter, and fidgetted upon the cushions like the foul fiend upon a bishop’s throne.

The prince scolded Fronsac, in a friendly tone, for evincing so little gratitude for this hospitable invitation, assuring him that he would this evening find only the most select society at the Palais Royal, for that it was one of his private parties.

‘My daughter, the Duchess de Berry, will be with us,’ added the prince. ‘You will find charming women and notorious rakes, but all of the first fashion. I hope you will not feel yourself contaminated amongst us, coming so lately from the moral, perfumed apartments of Madame de Maintenon ?’

‘But, my lord,’ said Fronsac, ‘look at my hunting costume and mud-stained boots !’

‘Never mind that, Fronsac ; my people shall attend upon you. I know the old, prudish devotee has daubed you from head to foot with etiquette.’

Upon hearing this the little abbé threw himself back in roars of laughter.

‘Silence, abbé ! we shall be taken for a parcel of fools.’

‘Why, in truth, we do not abound in wisdom !’ replied Dubois.

The carriage rolled into the court of the Palais Royal.

The prisoner was placed in the hands of two *valets-de-chambre* of the Duke of Orleans, and in the course of half an hour he left their hands one of the best dressed and most fashionable-looking youths of France and Navarre.

The suppers now given at the Palais Royal were the preludes to the orgies of the future regent.

These little nocturnal *fêtes* had, however, a character of libertinage, from which it might be presaged what they would hereafter become.

The *roués* of the Duke of Orleans were already numerous enough, but still he sought recruits amongst the discontented and debauched youths of the Court.

The Duke of Orleans was a thorn in the side of the old Court, for he possessed the secret of winning over all the laughers to his side.

The yoke of Madame de Maintenon had become odious to the Parisiens ; for the prolonged reign of Louis XIV fatigued them ; and the railing opposition of the *roués* against *l'antiquaille* amused the citizens.

It is impossible for the good people of Paris to continue long in a serious mood, no, not even when under the pressure of public calamities.

The misfortunes of the period of which we are writing only served to irritate them ; the fault was thrown upon their governors, they not taking the trouble to search for the real cause.

The Parisiens could not pardon the descendant of Henry IV for having quitted them. In their eyes, Louis XIV had committed a serious crime in building Versailles ; and they were ready and glad to avenge themselves by injurious railings against Louis le Grand whenever they found a favourable opportunity.

Louis XIV., like the old lion in the fable, had majestically retired to his royal den, but weak and feeble, no longer formidable, except by the recollection of his former greatness.

The Duke of Orleans, with a species of audacity, began to hold a sort of little Court at the Palais Royal.

His devoted friends looked upon him as the rising sun—as a prince doomed to rule the future fate of France, and in whom they ought to place their trust. Of the Grand Dauphin little was known, he choosing obstinately to live in a kind of monastic retreat ; and as for his son, the Duke of Burgundy, the *roués* had good hopes. He had many partisans, and what might not be hoped from the pupil of Fenelon and Beauvilliers ?

But the Duke of Burgundy, as heir presumptive, was retained under the eyes of the old king, at the Palace of Versailles, and never allowed to visit Paris. Even his popular manners could not break through the heavy grandeur and imposing barriers of Court etiquette.

The Duke de Berry, his brother, was an amiable and good young prince, but a complete stranger to public business and the march of opinions and ideas. It was reported that he had unfortunately fallen in love with his sister-in-law, the Duchess of Burgundy. He certainly did not love his wife, nor was he a favourite of hers.

The Duchess de Berry, daughter to the Duke of Orleans, took very little pains to hide her sentiments. This young princess was handsome, and given to gallantry, which was well known. She had a wild, high spirit, which revolted against all the prudish ideas of the old Court. Already, even at the period we are writing of, she was accused of libertinage and impiety by the people of Versailles. The king had severely reprimanded her on a solemn occasion. The preference of Louis for the Duchess of Burgundy was too marked and apparent not to irritate Madame de Berry to the quick. Therefore the sisters-in-law were sworn enemies.

As to Madame de Maintenon she hated her, and by her in return she was cordially detested.

The *legitimate* princes began to have, and to assume, an air of importance which was injurious to the Court; but more particularly the Duke de Maine, who was the object of all the king's care and tenderness.

This excessive preference was the work of Madame de Maintenon, under whose care he had been placed, and in consequence the Duke de Maine felt a species of devotion for her.

The name of the late Madame de Montespan, his mother, was never pronounced.

The vanity of this young man was excessive; he was wily and superstitious; he hated the Orleans party, and

the cowardly timidity of his character was subsequently displayed after the death of the king, when he struggled with the parliament against the pretensions of the regent.

The Count de Toulouse, his brother, was affable and intellectual ; and he kept aloof from all intrigue.

We have now given a brief sketch of the family of Louis XIV in 1711 — that is to say, what it was just before Death shot at them his fatal darts, with fell, relentless hand.

Midnight had sounded from the clock of the oratory.

In the streets all was dark and silent.

The night-watch trod his useless round ; not a belated drunken citizen was seen to reel towards his dwelling ; not one amorous youth disturbed the repose of the young females of the neighbourhood ; so much the better for the *échitens*, who might take their sleep in peace.

Some windows of the Palais Royal which looked towards the gardens were still resplendent with a blaze of light, but shortly the shutters of these were closed and bolted. They were the windows of the *petites appartements*.

In a handsome saloon of oval form, some ladies were chatting gaily and familiarly amongst themselves. Not a single man had yet joined their party ; but when they heard the appointed hour pealing from the clock's brazen tongue, they each began to arrange and put on a little mask of black velvet, which served merely to cover the upper part of the countenance, and which was considered to disguise them effectually.

It certainly sufficed to give them more assurance and rendered them more free in conversation than if their visages were not covered ; and could they not blush or let it alone without any one being the wiser ?

Suddenly the gilded folding doors flew open, and, without being announced, some men entered.

The greater part were young and handsome ; elegant in their manners and appearance.

By the free and easy air with which they presented themselves, it might be conjectured that they were familiar friends of the House.

There was the Count de Nocé, the Marquis de la Fare, the Duke de Brancas, the young Count de Fargy, the Chevalier de Simiani, the Marquis de Broglio, &c., &c.

As this was a *jour réservé* there was not one *comédien* in the number of the invited.

As for the ladies, their black masks were to them a guarantee of quality, if not of virtue or strength.

Dubois now appeared ; he had added some ribbons to his pretty little costume of abbé. Diamond rings sparkled upon his fingers, and so powerfully was he perfumed with vanilla that he might have been scented for a considerable distance.

He came to announce that the Duke of Orleans was but just arrived with a prisoner, whom he had made at the Porte St. Honoré.

The curiosity of all was inflamed.

The Abbé Dubois was surrounded, flattered, and caressed ; but all would not do, he was incorruptible, and revealed nothing.

It was pleasant to see the airs he gave himself in the midst of this fashionable crowd, who did not cease to question and torment him—when he was heard to exclaim—

‘ No, madame !—never, madame ! Impossible ! I am really miserable in refusing you—but—’

Dubois resisted all entreaties, seizing the fair hands of the curious inquirers, and with matchless impudence pressing them to his lips.

At last the prince himself appeared ; he was accompanied by the charming young Duke de Fronsac, who, upon this occasion, looked as handsome as Adonis. The scene at St. Germain had excited him so powerfully that he still looked pale ; but even his wan looks only made him more interesting, adding softness to features which were generally so lively and brilliant.

‘What do you think of my prisoner, ladies ?’ said the prince, presenting the young duke to them.

‘Fronsac ! Is it possible !’ cried the ladies in joyful accordance.

‘How handsome he is !’ said a soft female voice.

‘But how melancholy he looks, poor fellow !’ replied another voice.

‘What can the sweet fellow have done ?’ said a charming mouth, which the jealous mask could not hide.

‘It is quite true, Fronsac—you really are a little pale or so—some rouge, some rouge ! which of you little divinities will trust me with your rouge ? Take him then,’ said the prince, presenting Fronsac to one of the ladies, ‘and hide his lilies with the blush of the sweet rose,’ and the young duke’s cheeks received the carmine tint from the fair hands of the unknown.

‘*Parbleu !*’ said La F’re, to his neighbour, ‘is this young springald come hither to carry all before him with the ladies, as he does at Versailles ?’

‘Come now, don’t you be envious, friend Fargy, he is nearly as handsome as thou art,’ said Canillac.

This young Fargy had a superb figure, and bore an ex-ecl-

lent character, in consequence of which the *roués* had nicknamed him *le bon enfant*—Canillac called him *Mentor*, because in some of their wild freaks he had saved the prince himself from danger and infamous scandal.

Supper was announced—each gentleman made choice of a lady, and they passed into a charming and magnificent apartment, which might have been the work of a fairy. It was a masterpiece of elegance and luxury ; one might have fancied oneself in one of those magic halls in the palace of the Caliphs, those spoiled children of genies and enchanters.

As soon as the company was seated, a lively conversation commenced, though at first in rather timid tones. It seemed as if they were afraid to trust their wings in lofty flight, but as usual, would soar by degrees. Each was seated as chance directed (often a lucky star.) Fronsac had on his right a charming mask of wit and elegance. Etiquette was banished. The prince seated himself where he could find a place ; Canillac and the handsome Fargy occupied the centre, and were seated opposite to each other by way of presidents. The saloon was brilliant with wax lights, and embalmed with costly essences. Already were the eyes beginning to swim, and the tongues to wag freely, when the prince was observed to make the customary sign *in such cases*, and instantly all the attendants retired. The doors were closed, all order was at an end ; Paris might burn, nay the stars might fall. The entry of the saloon was now forbidden to all under pain of falling beneath the sabres of the guard.

Fronsac was determined to drive away care. Upon the eve of a marriage that was hateful to him, and at the same time madly in love with his divine duchess, what could he

do better. ? So welcome mirth and jollity, tipsy dance and revelry. His lively neighbour may have divined his thoughts, for she said a thousand witty things, and amorous fire sparkled in her eye.

The Duke of Orleans was in exuberant spirits. This prince, in spite of the vices which he had learned from Dubois, was yet an amiable man in every sense of the word. He had figure, mind, science, taste, united to a certain grandeur of soul. Louis XIV. knew him perhaps better than any one, and he called him a *fanfaron de vices*. But let us not outrage the ashes of the dead, whose posterity we are.

The moment of the confusion of tongues had arrived. From bitter, sharp-biting raillery some had passed to the mawkish cant of inebriety, revelling in sensuality ; the past forgotten, the future not thought of, the voluptuous beatitude of the present alone concerned them. The most perfect equality was the rule of the company, and if any one for a moment forgot, and answered personally by a *Monsieur !* to the half-t tipsy prince, they all rose with the fury of bacchantes painted upon their inflamed visages, declared the person who had answered thus traitor to the republic, and condemned him to repeated bumpers, until he fell under the table.

The ladies as yet put a good face upon things ; they had already much to pardon, but their mask was respected.

Fronsac's neighbour had kept up a lively conversation with him on the subject of certain beauties of the Court. At some moments when she raised her voice, Fronsac fancied he knew his enchantress, and if he were right, he no longer wondered at the bitter dislike that she evinced for the Duchess of Burgundy.

‘I know you, siren,’ said he to her, in a low voice.

‘Do you! who am I then?’ enquired the lady, as she leaned languidly on the shoulder of the young duke.

‘You are a—a high—and lofty one! ’

‘Ha! am I handsome, or ugly? ’

‘A direct answer might prove unpleasing.’

‘Really!’ muttered the enchantress, ‘thou art enough to make one die of chagrin. You think me decidedly ugly then?’ She raised her hand to untie her mask, when suddenly the lights were all extinguished, as if by magic.

This was one of the prince’s happy thoughts to spare the blushes of the ladies who were invited to the prince’s *petits soupers*. The loud voices ceased, and conversation was carried on in low murmurs or in softer whispers, and by intervals vague sighs or prolonged plaints murmured in the darkness, and sometimes a satanic laugh rent the air with its hissing tone, or a crash announced the heavy fall of the wine-filled reveller. The ringing of glass, the cracking of porcelain, and the creaking of sofas mixed their discordant notes in this strange harmony. These were the shameful effects of delirious inebriety.

The young Duke de Fronsac, in whom a spark of reason still remained, was diligently seeking, in the obscurity which surrounded him, for a medallion, on which he set a value above all price. This jewel, which he wore constantly next to his heart, had either fallen, or had been snatched from him. Fronsac had frequently prayed for a light, but roars of laughter or ribald jests were the only reply, and upon his knees he continued to search for his talisman. But now the walls of the saloon were tinged with a pale blue light, and some horrid-looking shades glided slowly over them. In the course of the evening the

conversation had run upon magic and sorcery, and this scene of phantasmagoria was very *à propos*. Phantom after phantom stalked in gloomy silence upon the wall. Fortune might be seen giving her hand to Voluptuousness, then came Slavery and Fanaticism, followed by Liberty with a casque on her head, and a sword in her hand. Other horrid figures passed in succession—there was something horrible in these fantastic allegories. Death appeared, breaking crowns with his bony hands; Destiny followed him, and gathered up the ruins of the royal diadems.

‘Enough! enough!’ cried many female voices, fainting with fear.

We have said in a former page that at eleven the night was dark and stormy, but at this moment the loud claps of thunder shook the palace to its foundation. Windows rattled in their frames; the closed shutters intercepted the forked lightning, but the voice of the loud thunder was incessant and most terrific. One crash was awful, stunning! The palace was struck, and cries of terror and distress filled the dark banqueting hall. The valets flew to the door, which it was forbidden them to open, and cried from the antechamber—

‘Monseigneur! Monseigneur! a thunder-bolt has fallen!’

‘To the devil with you and the thunder,’ replied a voice.

‘It has struck the palace, monseigneur! Fire! fire! The palace is on fire!’

There was no longer time for hesitation, the doors flew open, and the vivid lightning now flashed in their terror-struck faces, and they rushed out, uttering cries of despair.

With dishevelled tresses they flew across the corridors inundated by the violence of the pelting storm. Others

fainting, sank into the arms of the first comer who took compassion upon them. Many sought to regain their carriages, into which they threw themselves, pale as ghosts, their gala robes dripping with rain, with streaming hair, haggard eye, and delirious head.

One young man in despair remained in the chaotic but deserted banqueting hall, still searching amongst the ruins of the feast for the fatal medallion.

The brilliant flashes of lightning aided his search but he found only broken glass and porcelain, mantles stained with wine, and fragments of plumes and flounces.

Suddenly an infernal laugh was heard proceeding from behind him, as if in derision at his attempts to recover the lost talisman. Fronsac turned in a paroxysm of anger, but the person had disappeared.

Boiling with rage he escaped from the burning palace, and flew with hasty step across the inundated streets, like a furious maulman who had broken through his prison bars.

Such was the miserable and fearful ending of a profligate, wicked entertainment.

CHAPTER IV

THE BRIDEGROOM'S FLIGHT.

THE day succeeding this memorable *fête* at the Palais Royal was one of the most delightful days of the spring. The gardens of Paris, so numerous then, exhibited their fresh and tender verdure ; deep groves of elms, poplars, and chesnuts were seen on all sides, and separated the great hotels, convents, and royal buildings. If Paris is now more regular, it was then much more picturesque.

The architecture of the seventeenth century had replaced that of a former age. It had demolished houses fortified with turrets ; and donjon keeps and palaces were erected in their stead.

It was in some degree building monarchy upon the ruins of *feodalité*, it was replacing the belted knight by the great lord, the coat of mail and the morion by a habit of velvet embroidered with gold, and the hat with its plume of feathers.

It was a change but it might not be a degeneration. Let us take a peep at modern Paris.

Between the Place Vendôme and the Place Louis XV we have the Rue de Rivoli. This long and white placard was sustained by a corridor of arcades. Look at that mean and vulgar edifice in the midst of this grand and noble architecture, and there in the midst of a street the most renowned amongst the new—what shall we say to so many magnificent hotels demolished to their very foundations,

sold in detail, pillar by pillar, stone by stone, to be replaced by immense cages, pierced with a thousand holes, which are called windows ?

What is become of all the delightful gardens, of the waters, fountains, verdure, and flowers, which were the joy and delight of the quarter ? All, all are destroyed, buried under these mountains of stone and lime, and if there yet remain a few at long distances, they will also, sooner or later, be swallowed up.

And what is to be the end of this ? Is Paris destined to become a town of manufactories, of barracks, and of warehouses for merchants ?

Ay, but the French have become equal in the eye of the law ; France has constitutional charters ; nothing can be better.

There is no longer in France a title, a privilege, or a single personal distinction, and of what consequence is that ? But in the name of heaven respect your city, and what is yet left of it that is great, or beautiful, or of historic value. Thanks for the few buildings which are left, which are still valued for their recollections and their architecture.

You have sapped and laid low the hotels—Byron, Breteuil, Wyes, Nesle, Choiseul, Montmorency, and others ; you have built ten houses of vile taste upon each of them ; you have covered with stones all the green enclosures of the convents and abbeys ; you have demolished churches, or you have turned them into stables, coach-houses, or warehouses. Be content then, and let your Vandal rage be appeased, or in a short time we expect the pleasure of seeing you erect a third, or perhaps a sixth, story on the roofs of the Place Vendôme and Place Royale ; or perhaps you

may even choose to erect steam chimneys between the columns of the *façade* Louvre.

We have said that the morning which succeeded to the night of the storm was fresh and delightful, as if it had been made expressly for a bridal morning. Day had passed away, and six hours after vespers had pealed from the turrets of the numerous belfries of Paris, whose spires were glittering in the setting sun.

The shadows began to deepen in the streets and squares, with that neutral tint which is so favourable to reverie.

The environs of the Rue de Richelieu and of the Rue St. Honoré were in a tumult ; the windows, balconies, and doors were crowded with spectators.

They were in expectation of the arrival of many splendid equipages at the Hotel of the Duke de Richelieu before the night closed.

Suddenly a loud exclamation was given by the crowd, and each strove for the best position to gratify curiosity.

A running footman now appeared in splendid habit, his plumes fluttering in the wind ; in his left hand he bore a torch, in his right a vermillion-coloured cane with tassels of gold and silk ; he bore upon his breast and upon his shoulder a double escutcheon, embroidered with the arms of Richelieu and De Noailles.

Numerous pikemen followed on horseback ; a great number of gentlemen succeeded these, and surrounded a carriage which was splendidly gilt from the wheels to the summit of its imperial.

Through its windows the crowd might distinguish those who sat in the carriage.

The Duchess de Richelieu and the Maréchale de Noailles

occupied *le fond*; between them, a little in front, was seated a charming young female, whose beauteous features were partly hidden by a rich lace veil, fine as the wing of gossamer, and surmounted by a little coronet of brilliants—she was the bridal Duchess de Fronsac.

The duke, her youthful spouse, occupied the front seat opposite to the ladies, and he saluted with matchless grace his friends who felicitated him in the street, and from the neighbouring balconies.

The carriage which followed bore the arms of Cardinal de Noailles, the holy and illustrious Archbishop of Paris. His eminence had from the sacred altar blessed the nuptials of his nephew and niece.

In the carriage of the archbishop were also seated the Duke de Richelieu, the Duke de Luxembourg, and a gentleman of the chamber, sent by his majesty.

Many other brilliant equipages followed. Ladies of lofty sounding titles did not fail to find a place in this *cortège*.

The Hotel de Richelieu (in our day so unworthily disguised by the grotesque fripperies of a Babin), sparkled with lights, and perfumed the surrounding air with its festoons of flowers; red heels crowded upon its marbled and inlaid floors; noble heads, charming features, and divine figures were reflected in the splendid mirrors of its vast saloons.

The company assembled at the hotel of the father of the Duke de Fronsac were illustrious and distinguished by their rank and station.

The Duke de Richelieu began to feel the effects of age and war, but he was still vigorous of mind—he acted the great man with too much severity, perhaps fancying that any outward show of paternal affection might be construed into weakness.

As to the young Duchess de Fronsac, she did not attempt to hide her happiness ; for she had long secretly adored the youth she had espoused. She was not merely beautiful, but she was a charming creature, with an angelic expression, and sylph-like figure. The happy bride smiled at her friends, and blushed, and blushed, as brides always do.

As to her mother, the Duchess de Richelieu, who had been widow to the late Marquis de Noailles, she triumphed in her glory, there is no reason to doubt, from the great airs she took upon herself in her imposing robes of splendid silver brocade.

But there was one lady at least there who beheld this sacrifice with almost tearful eye, when she looked at the wan features of her poor young friend, Fronsac, and this was the good maréchale.

Amongst the most fashionable young men of the Court, there were two whom Fronsac regarded with the eye of friendship, the Count de Nangis and the Duke de Brissac. Nangis had six or seven years' more experience of life. Brissac was nearer to his own age ; both of them attended at his nuptials.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when Brissac approached his *happy* friend to take leave of him.

‘What ! already, Brissac ?’ said the bridegroom.

‘Don’t you know,’ replied his friend, ‘that this evening there is a ball at Marly. I shall have barely time to fly thither, and I am to figure in the minuet.’

The visage of Fronsac was suddenly overcast, as if he had just heard of some great misfortune ; and seizing the hand of the Duke de Brissac he pressed it, and said—‘Away with thee to Marly, my friend. They have not married thee !’

Fronsac ground his teeth in a frightful manner.

Brissac cordially pressed his friend's hands, and made his escape.

Nangis, who was also on the wing to Marly, was not long in following. Fronsac saw him ready to depart, wrung his hand, and bade him a melancholy adieu.

'How unfortunate for our poor friend, Fronsac,' said Nangis to his companion, as they descended the stairs, 'to be married on the very day of the ball in which he was to have danced in the second minuet with our royal beauties!'

Some one followed them down the stairs, with light and rapid foot; they turned to look, and they beheld Fronsac.

'What now—what now, my friend?' said the young men to him.

The Duke de Fronsac put his finger to his lip in token of silence, and drawing them aside he whispered a few words into their ears, with an air of great animation.

'It is not possible!' cried Nangis.

'Away with you, my dear count! away, away!' replied Fronsac.

Then he returned to the apartments still crowded with company. Each took a formal leave of the Duke and Duchess de Richelieu, and in less than an hour these vast saloons were deserted, except by the family party.

Fronsac kissed the hand of his father and step-mother, and retired to his own suite of apartments, leaving his bride to the care of her relatives, who would accompany her even to the bridal chamber.

The young duchess was surrounded by many dear friends, but from whom she must soon separate.

It was yet scarcely ten o'clock ; it was a beautiful night, and thousands of stars sparkled in the deep blue of the firmament.

The bridal apartment looked towards the garden ; a faint voluptuous light illumined the rich tints of its tapestry hangings ; perfumes, composed of essence of amber and rose, embalmed the air, and the soft breeze of spring sighed through the tufted groves of lilacs, which grew near to the windows. A mysterious silence reigned in this splendid apartment.

Muffled up in the folds of a vast mantle, a figure descended a private staircase with stealthy step ; he carried no taper, his hands were his only guide.

When he arrived at a little door, which opened to the garden, in a low tone of voice he called—‘Georges !’ Who instantly replied in the same tone—‘Here, my lord.’

This man preceded him with noiseless step to a postern, which was situated at the extremity of the garden ; it was open, and a travelling carriage was in waiting.

Georges and his impatient master sprang in.

The postillion seemed to know his destination, and how he must manage his horses, for he set out with as little noise as possible, but when he was once clearly outside of the Gate St. Honoré, he lashed his steeds into a full gallop, and the carriage flew almost with the rapidity of the wind.

CHAPTER V

THE FÊTE AT MARLY.

THE *fête* at Marly was given by Madame de Maintenon to the family of Louis XIV. The aged monarch assisted at the ball ; he entered as seriously majestic as if it had been a reception of ambassadors.

But those who knew him might discover a little play of features, and a faint smile lurked in the corner of his lips ; and there were those who anxiously hoped that he would be amused by the exhibitions of the evening. All the royal party appeared to be in good spirits, and Madame de Maintenon was heard to sigh with pleased anxiety.

The Château of Marly is no more ; it has disappeared like so many others by the brutal fury of the demolishers.

At a short distance from the site of Marly stands St. Germain, and is it not at this moment a barrack, and a prison ? *O Beotiens !*

Upon this *soirée* of April, anno 1711, the royal family of Louis XIV were united around their glorious grand-sire, whose vexations and chagrins they hoped to soften and amuse.

This *fête* was elegant and simple, but cordial. The king, whose soul was softened by degrees, called his family *mes enfants*, and at last seemed quite to forget that he was the mighty, glorious monarch !

The king was seated in the octagon saloon, of which Mausard was the magic architect ; next to him was placed

the young princesses of his house, then his granddaughters, and grandnieces. Amongst them was one greatly beloved by the old monarch ; she was a descendant of Condé, who recalled the memory of her ancestor by the beauty of her visage and her nobleness of soul—it was Mademoiselle de Charolais. She was still youthful, attractive, and distinguished. Louis found infinite pleasure in a chat with her, forgetting for a moment the war and public distress, whilst inhaling the perfume of youth and candour, which is a celestial emanation. Mademoiselle de Charolais spoke of the charming walks, and the pleasures of Chantilly ; the angling parties to the lakes, the falcon flights, the evening readings, and the village sports, when an interesting young person came to interrupt their pleasant chat. She looked pale, and her features were unanimated, notwithstanding the fire of her eyes.

Louis took her hand affectionately, and said—

‘ How now, my pretty one, what has annoyed you ? ’

‘ Me, sire ! ’ said she, endeavouring to rally her spirits. ‘ I am so happy to see you looking so gay, and enjoying yourself, my dear grandpa.’

‘ My pretty cousin,’ said the king to Mademoiselle de Charolais, ‘ you must love my daughter ; you would not believe what a good little soul it is.’

At these words the beauteous Duchess of Burgundy seated herself near to Mademoiselle de Charolais, and like two angels they strove to amuse the old king with their sprightly conversation.

The ball was delightful—all was joy and harmony ; diamonds sparkled, and feathers waved.

Quadrilles were formed of various figures ; the dancing was elegant and finished.

The formal etiquette of Versailles had been replaced by a freedom of *bon ton*, but always subdued, and in which admirable tact was displayed. It was the ease of high society.

There shone in all their lustre youth and beauty, for there were the two princesses of whom we have spoken, and others of the branch of Condé, Mademoiselle de Clairmont, and Mademoiselle the Princess of Conti ; there were also the Duchesses of de Mouchy, de Labran, and de Charost, the Ladies Chaulnes, and Rochefoucald.

The daughter of the Duke of Orleans, the Duchess of Berry, was also there, and her fine figure and her wit caused great attraction—her diamonds were the admiration of all.

These brilliants truly of royal magnificence sparkled in her blonde hair, upon her arms, her throat, her shoulders, waist, and amidst the garlands of flowers which trimmed her robes.

The king good-naturedly seemed to wish to forget her past *petites tracasseries* ; as for the Duchess of Burgundy, she contented herself with returning politeness by politeness, but without the least approach to familiarity.

The Duke de Berry appeared alone at this ball ; the dauphin, his father, was an invalid, and the Duke of Burgundy, his elder brother, had not yet returned from Fontainebleau.

Those who were initiated in the intrigues of the Court watched the prince with the corner of their eye, who was suspected of being desperately in love with his sister-in-law, the Duchess of Burgundy.

He danced with her in a quadrille and the Duke of Maine with Mademoiselle de Clairmont, Count Toulouse

with Madame de Mouchy, and the young Duke de Brissac with Madame de la Rochefoucauld.

It happened that after this quadrille the king called Brissac to him, and with an absent air questioned him as to the particulars of the marriage which he had that day attended.

The Duchess of Burgundy who was there would gladly have risen, but Mademoiselle Charolais retained her by the grasp of friendship ; probably she was fearful of betraying her feelings to the king.

Brissac, partly aware how matters stood, replied with great brevity ; the Duchess of Burgundy in the meantime was of marble paleness.

‘Madame,’ said her sister-in-law, who at this moment approached her, ‘for heaven’s sake, what is the matter with you ?—you are deadly pale.’

The princess spoke these words in a tone of irony. The Duchess of Burgundy calmly replied, without looking at her, that she was really too kind, too easily alarmed ; for a moment she had felt slightly indisposed, but that it was a mere nothing, and that she should dance the next minuet with the Duke de Brissac.

The king, who had been an attentive listener, said—

‘Duke, thou art challenged. *Allons*, duke, and show thyself worthy of it.’

Brissac bowed, and retired towards a neighbouring group, as if waiting for the violins.

It was approaching midnight when a rumour spread in the apartment next to where the king was seated that the Duke de Fronsac was arrived at Marly. This appeared most extraordinary—incredible for two reasons.

It was Fronsac’s wedding night, and, besides, surely he

would not dare to enter the ball-room so long after the arrival of the king and the royal family. His secret enemies already began to rejoice and exult in this mad extravagance.

The news had not yet reached the king's saloon when the handsome young duke entered the apartments, wearing his nuptial dress resplendent with gold and sparkling gems.

When he appeared, Nangis and the Marquis de Cavoye sprang before him as if to hide his person.

‘What madness is this?’ inquired Nangis.

‘What can you be thinking about?’ added Cavoye.

‘*Parbleu!* gentlemen,’ said the duke with perfect coolness, ‘do you think that my brain is diseased, or that I am become a fool?’ and pressing their hands he passed forward towards the adjoining apartment where the king sat.

Every one made way, leaving him a free passage; some devoured him with their eyes, some felt interested in him, others hoped to see him disgraced and ruined. Curiosity was at high pressure.

When the daring Duke de Fronsac was first noticed in the royal saloon it caused a murmur of surprise, nearly of fright. The princes regarded each other as if perfectly astonished.

The Count de Toulouse, who was naturally good-natured, was ready to undertake the defence of poor Fronsac, when a hand touched his from behind, and caused him to halt. It was the hand of Madame de Maintenon.

The king upon all such occasions was truly dignified. A single look to Madame de Berry imposed silence, and checked her laugh of bitter irony, and without uttering a word, Louis allowed time for Fronsac to approach and to speak.

The young duke was very pale, his fine eyes were down-cast, but his features were firm. At a sign from the king, Fronsac bowed gracefully and said—

‘Sire, no event—no human power could keep me from Marly when your majesty had deigned to invite me—and I humbly implore your majesty’s pardon for arriving so late.’

A profound silence reigned in the saloon. The king cast a rapid glance at Madame de Maintenon, who wore an angry look ; from her the king’s regards fell upon the Duchess of Burgundy, whose emotion almost betrayed her ; the king then turned once more to Fronsac, and said in a calm tone—

‘Duke, you are welcome.’

These few soft words, like a ray of light, illumined every face with joy except two, which paled with spite.

The sprightly tones of the violins announced the minuet. The young Duke de Brissac made his bow to the Duchess of Burgundy. She arose serene and beautiful, looking like a pardoned angel. Never had she danced with so much grace and majesty.

The good, affectionate king had tears in his eyes ; his regards followed the young duchess, he applauded her with his hand, and occasionally turning towards Mademoiselle de Charolais, he spoke to her of his *chère fille* with fond tenderness.

It was a custom after a minuet for the gentleman to come a second time and request his partner to honour him with her hand in a second dance ; this was called then *rendre le menuet*.

By a strange fatality the Duke de Brissac forgot this law of the ball, and when the violins recommenced to play he was seen with astonishment to solicit Madame de Mouchy.

The Duchess of Burgundy had felt so assured of dancing with him a second time that she had already risen.

Fronsac beheld this, flew to her, bowed with inexpressible grace, and said—

‘If you will permit me, madame, I will repair the fault of my friend Brissac.’

Certainly it was an unexpected pleasure to the duchess, but it was also a happiness to be deplored.

Madame de Maintenon approached the king ; she made him take notice how conspicuous the young Fronsac’s passion had become.

The Duke de Berry also spoke aloud and in bitter terms, and as to the duchess, his wife, she railed at full speed with some of the courtiers.

Suddenly the king assumed a serious air, and when the Duchess of Burgundy reseated herself near to his majesty, he looked another way, and did not address a single word to her.

Fronsac was too inebriated with his success to perceive anything of this, and moreover he was in a humour to have defied all the kings in Europe.

There are certain great passions which do not require the spur—like the generous steed, once accustomed to the cannon’s roar and to the hissing of the balls, they plunge into the thickest of the fight, and carry their rider into fire and glory.

After this fatal minuet, after having exchanged looks with the most beautiful eyes in the world, Fronsac’s brain was in a state of delirium—he was no longer master of that moral force which had hitherto rendered him victorious over himself.

Brissac, who had made his humble apology at the feet

of the lovely duchess, now went in search of Fronsac ; then both of them passed into a neighbouring saloon, when Brissac, taking the young duke's hand said—

‘ Duke, I thank you ; at the first moment I was angry, but thou hast nobly repaired my fault ; now look to thyself — Fronsac, beware ! Art thou really delirious ? The king is departing, let us return to Paris. Thy wife, duke — think of thy wife ! ’

Fronsac only replied by one of those smiles which are untranslatable into any human language.

The king retired, followed by Madame de Maintenon, the Duke of Maine, and many others. Brissac and his friend, Fronsac, left the château ; Nangis and Cavoye rejoined them.

The nigh twas superbly fine. Fronsac said that his *valet-de-chambre* waited in an apartment of the governor of Marly's to undress him—his friends quizzed him upon the subject of his wedding garments, which seemed to be too hot for him.

Fronsac found Georges at his post, and in less than ten minutes he had changed his costume for great spurred boots, a hunting-dress, and had buckled on a heavy sword.

Two vigorous horses awaited him behind a wall near the wood ; he instantly mounted one, Georges the other, and then set forward at a gentle pace on the side of the long avenue which leads from Marly to Versailles—arrived at the great wood, they took a by-way, leaving the *chaussée* free. They ride under the shade of the oaks, for the moon inundated with light the open glade.

Many carriages passed preceded by horsemen carrying lighted flambeaux. These were returning to Versailles.

Fronsac kept his moderate pace and always under shadow of the oaks.

Oh ! lovely night, how sweet to him was the perfumed air, embalmed with thyme, and all the sweet flowers of delicious spring. Lost in a thousand busy thoughts, he was roused by the noise of an approaching carriage ; the wood was gloomy, and the shade was thick, caused by these gigantic trees. Two horseman approached, the red torch in hand ; he let them pass—the carriage had no other escort—he knew it.

The carriage came thundering on, it was drawn by six horses ; Fronsac let it pass, and then giving the spur to his steed, in a few bounds he was at the carriage door. One female only was in this carriage ; a mantle of black lace enveloped her shoulders and her head, through which gauzy covering the brilliants faintly sparkled.

The lady instantly knew the chevalier, and her first movement was to throw herself back in the carriage ; but either remorse or some other feeling again caused her to lean forward. The cavalier had his hat in his hand, he continued to escort the carriage in silence ; he almost touched the wheels yet managed his horse with marvellous address, and in the mean time he threw so suppliant a regard upon the lady in the mantle, that a hand, white as alabaster, was laid upon the velvet of the carriage window. Then the cavalier bowed his head upon this adorable hand, and respectfully touched it with his lips, though at the risk of being dashed under the carriage. The hand was not withdrawn, but the lady supplicated the cavalier to retire ; this he instantly did, darting across the forest in another direction.

What an adieu !

C H A P T E R VI.

A DUEL BY NIGHT.

THE Duke de Richelieu was outrageous at the behaviour of his son, and wrote to the king, and to Madame de Maintenon, to request a *lettre de cachet*, soliciting a dungeon of the Bastille for the Duke de Fronsac with as much earnestness as if he had been asking a regiment for him.

The Duchess de Richelieu had fallen sick with vexation, the affront given to her daughter was the cause. The king, who had really taken a fancy for Fronsac, could not instantly decide upon treating him with so much severity. He even for some time resisted the solicitations of Madame de Maintenon, who was the devoted friend of the Duke de Richelieu ; the interest of the favourite in Fronsac had vanished from the moment that she discovered there was an intelligence of the heart between this young man and the Duchess of Burgundy.

She had spoken plainly to the king on the subject, laying all the blame upon Fronsac, for Louis would not bear a shadow of wrong to rest upon his *chère fille*. Some enemies of the young duke hoped to profit by this occasion, and to take advantage of his disgrace ; they spoke of him as of a dangerous young man, whom they held in disdain, and who had already all the vices and audacity of a *roué*.

Many, who pretended to take an interest in the family of

Richelieu, went to relate little infamies of the Duke de Fronsac in the saloon of Madame de Maintenon.

However, when the Duchess of Burgundy appeared all conversation of this sort ceased, and no one dared to pronounce the name of the young duke.

The letter of the Duke de Richelieu was received by Madame de Maintenon the day after the *fête* of Marly.

The Court was returned to Versailles. The king read this letter very seriously, and then returned it to Madame de Maintenon. And as she persevered in knowing his majesty's intentions, the king replied in his usual manner when anything annoyed him—

‘I shall see.’

Which, proceeding from the mouth of the old king, amounted to his saying—‘You fatigue and annoy, and you will oblige by troubling me no more upon this subject.’

Whilst this little adventure occupied the grave saloons of Versailles, several young seigneurs, who had been hunting the stag through the day, were reposing and refreshing themselves in a little inn situated upon the highway to Fontainebleau.

Their horses were sorely fatigued, night had fallen suddenly, and they were compelled to halt at two leagues from the town at this *Faisan Royal*; far however from royal in appearance, being the very worst *cabaret* in the district.

The huntsmen now arrived with tired horses, and limping stag hounds; there was neighing of horses, cracking of whips, curses from the huntsmen, and horrid yells from the hounds. The host stood staring with open mouth, utterly confounded. Never had such a noble company graced the little apartments of the *Faisan Royal*.

‘St. Dennis and all saints be my guard !’ inwardly ejaculated poor Boniface. ‘Nothing is good enough—nothing is too dear for them ; these gentry talk, eat, and drink as if they were princes.’

By good luck this block of a host had a smart, pretty daughter, and probably he had to thank her that his house was not burnt over his head.

The wine of Fontainebleau is not the best in the world, neither was that of the *Faisan Royal*, certainly no one could complain of its antiquity ; but the day had been fine and the sport capital, even the vile accommodation afforded by the *cabaret* was from its novelty *piquante*.

The young sportsmen were full of glee and life, and as to the eyes of their host’s daughter, where would they find brighter ? No, not even at Versailles.

The hunters supped in a room adjoining the kitchen. This was the *salle d’ honneur* of the house. It had *crédences* (cupboards) of the fifteenth century well stored with ponderous vessels of pewter.

A long, narrow table was in the middle of the room ; the hunters surrounded it, drinking out of coarse blue glasses, and eating with wooden forks. Of game they had enough, which the host brought in unceasingly upon large plates, *rôts et entrées* all jumbled together. A monstrous fire blazed in the kitchen, and there was a dreadful tumult and bustle in every part of the house.

These jovial companions were no vulgar poachers, no every day visitors of such a house, for here might have been seen the Count de Nocé, the Marquis de la Fare, the Chevalier de Simiani, Count de Riom, colonel of a regiment of Carabineers, and many others of less important names. These gentlemen were not in favour at

Versailles ; they cared not for this, it had no effect upon their joyous lives.

The Court was the everlasting butt at which they fired their jokes ; it was who could best show off *l'antiquaille* as it was then nick-named.

After a long and general conversation of the sports of the field, their daring adventures and break-neck escapes, they amused themselves with chatting over the news of the day ; they spoke of Marly, of the *Devotée*, of young and beautiful ladies, of *prudes*, and libertines, of the theatre-players, actresses—in short, the merry dogs rattled away upon whatever came uppermost.

And such was the noise they made, that the host and his waiters were utterly confounded. At this moment a valet opened the door and informed the bothered master of the *Faisan Royal*, who had not heard the thundering at the outer door, that another traveller had just arrived.

‘*Miséricorde !*’ ejaculated the host, ‘what, another ?’

The stranger was already in the kitchen, and without any ceremony took possession of a vacant stool, and seated himself near the immense fireplace.

The night air was fresh, and the cavalier was wet with the dew. The host’s daughter speedily remarked that he was both young and handsome, had a fine figure, and when he took off his gloves she was greatly struck with the delicate whiteness of his hands. When she paused near him, as if by chance, he found her so charming, that he caught her round the waist and embraced her.

At this moment her melting father passed, bearing another mess of venison to his guests, and said, as he passed—

‘You are free and easy, young sir, and no doubt you

belong to the company of the gentlemen in the parlour—perhaps you will be pleased to join their table?’

‘I have no friends here; I am a stranger, and I travel alone,’ said the handsome youth.

The host ventured a searching look, but seemed quite satisfied with the stranger’s appearance, admired the richness of his trimmed habit, nor was a peep at his spurred boots omitted; he passed onwards but returned in a few seconds to inquire if the stranger would prefer to eat alone.

Upon his answering, ‘Certainly’—

‘Then, sir, if you will but have patience for a few minutes, you shall have everything decent, and comfortable. Those madcaps’ (winking) ‘in the other room will soon be quiet enough, their eyes are heavy already, and their tongues are thick. Lord love you, my dear young sir, I never saw such drinking in all my life, nor did I ever hear such discourse. Hush, whisper! between you and me, they are real imps. Only think of it, my cellar is nearly emptied, and they have eaten as much as forty hungry ploughmen. And for their diabolical, wicked conversation may God pardon them.’

And the good man made the sign of the cross.

‘And pray who are these gentry?’ said the young man, in a careless tone, whilst warming his feet.

‘Who are they?’ replied the host; ‘stag-hunters, and for what I know, gentlemen, *pardieu!* clad much like yourself.’

The stranger gave more attention at this moment to the voices which sounded from the next room. Suddenly, some one in a bacchanal tone roared out the following couplet, then the fashion amongst a certain set:—

‘Du papier, pour ducats,
Un devot, pour Turenne,
Une xxx, pour la reine.
Grand Dieu ! l’étrange cas !
Ne m’entendez-vous pas ?’

‘Ha, ha !’ said the stranger to himself. ‘Are you there ?—methinks I begin to smell a rat.’

And in consequence he requested his host to let him have his supper where he was. This was instantly complied with, thanks to the quick hand of the pretty daughter—the Sweet-pea of the *Faisan Royal* and its environs.

The young stranger emptied his glass with a jocund air. The uproar in the next room seemed to increase, and twice the youthful stranger was about to start from his seat, for names dear to his heart were pronounced, and twice the pretty hand of the host’s daughter had kept him from rising.

‘Never heed these noisy madmen, sir. These *coquines de qualité* are holding a chapter, they are not worth disturbing your supper for.’

‘Gentlemen,’ roared one of the noisy party, ‘I am going to propose a health—here’s to virtue !’

This was replied to by clapping of hands, and roars of laughter. And they voted virtue a land of chimeras ! Another of these madmen proposed the devil’s health, and bumpers were filled and emptied to his Satanic majesty.

Then followed a list of powerful and gallant dames, which were drank in flowing goblets amidst the ringing of glasses, and loud huzzas. Then was given the *Lady of the Medallion*—for drunk as the most of them now were, they did not name her otherwise. This toast hissed like

a serpent in the young stranger's ears. Then he, also, arose, glass in hand, and when the toast was given he added in a voice of thunder—

‘Yes, to that woman who is the honour and glory of her sex, in spite of your barkings, dogs that you are !’

If a thunderbolt had fallen it could not have astonished them more. The revellers rose, and in a confused body rushed into the kitchen, where the Duke de Fronsac calmly awaited them, with his arms closed and his back turned to the fire.

Perhaps they imagined for a moment that it was the Evil One himself who stood before the enormous fire ; the red glare lighted up the blackened walls, and was reflected by the burnished copper vessels. These fiery tints fell upon visages inflamed with wine and rage. Profound silence reigned, and all these forms, which appeared like those of so many phantoms, furnishing a frightful picture, made the host fly into a dark corner almost dying with fear. Fronsac, and the revellers ranged into a half circle before him, looked at each other for some time before they found words to evince their animosity. At last one of them cried—

‘Dogs, did you say ?’

‘True, dogs,’ answered Fronsac, ‘since you coward-like bark and bite at so noble and defenceless a creature.’

‘I prithee repeat that !’ roared the Count de Riom with the voice of a stentor.

‘Repeat it ! ay, by heavens, Riom, I am delighted to throw it in thy teeth !’ replied the gallant youth. ‘Thou art a mere mad-dog, and as for the medallion that thou hast torn from me, thou shalt render me an account of it.’

Fronsac drew his sword, and instantly out flew every blade from its scabbard.

‘Gentlemen ! gentlemen !’ exclaimed Riom, ‘this is solely my business, and since the Duke de Fronsac has done me the honour to point at me, it only remains for me to crop his ears.’

‘Come on, boaster !’ cried Fronsac ; ‘one of us shall remain upon the field, and bite the dust.’

In a tumultuous crowd they hurried out of the house.

The night continued fine, but the stars alone now lent their light. The ground was soon chosen ; there was a little meadow newly mown, close to the road, which traversed the forest ; the trees which surrounded it were of great growth. Two of the revellers were appointed as seconds to Fronsac ; and the two champions, sword in hand, instantly advanced upon each other, and crossed their weapons. Riom was strongly excited ; as to Fronsac, he was as cool as customary in such a case.

Much the junior of Riom, and less proficient in the art of fencing, he awaited his adversary’s attack, who tried his points, but found him firm and assured.

Then commenced some skilful passes, feints, and lunges, so admirably invented to send a man out of the world with method and elegance, but the want of light deceived the finest calculations, and often the thirsty steel stabbed merely the yielding air. Impatient at a combat without result, Fronsac made more vigorous lunges.

‘Bravo, monsieur !’ cried Riom ; ‘very well indeed ! what a scientific hand !’

At the same moment he parried a reverse, and passed the point of his sword into the arm of the young duke.

‘You are wounded, duke.’

‘ “Tis nothing, sir,’ said Fronsac ; ‘ come on.’

‘ Not I, by heavens, sir ! ’ exclaimed the other.

‘ Ha ! no more words,’ said Fronsac, and in spite of the blood that flowed from his arm, he pushed so vigorously at the breast of Riom that he narrowly escaped being run through.

The affair was becoming very serious, when an unforeseen event occurred.

Suddenly the combatants were surrounded with a blaze of light ; it proceeded from mounted guards, who bore torches of resin, and who had quitted the highway for the purpose of putting an end to the fray. The combatants paused, and then lowered their swords, as a man of about thirty years of age alighted from his carriage, and came upon the ground. He was well known to all the party, for it was the Duke of Burgundy, followed by his *menins* or favourites, on his way from Fontainebleau to Versailles.

‘ What is all this—what is the matter, gentlemen ? How—a duel by night, and in the forest ? Why, it is throat-cutting, messieurs ! ’

Fronsac busied himself in binding up his arm in a handkerchief.

‘ Thou art wounded,’ said the prince. Then turning to the Marquis de Gamache, his *menin*, he ordered him to place the Duke de Fronsac in one of the carriages of his suite, and not to lose sight of him until he was safe in Paris.

‘ Monseigneur,’ said Fronsac, ‘ I was on my way to my estate in Guienne, and I pray your highness to let me proceed on my journey.’

‘ My little duke,’ replied the prince, ‘ the care of Madame de Fronsac and your family is now necessary to you, and therefore it would be cruel in me to grant your

request. As for you, Monsieur Riom, and you other gentlemen, you will please to go on your way without halting at the *cabaret*. Perhaps I ought to be more severe. Adieu, messieurs.'

Fronsac was placed in one of the carriages and Gamache paid his wound every attention in his power.

The poor young duke suffered much from the pain of his arm, but much more from his heart.

Arrived at Paris he requested Gamache to have him taken to the house of his friend Brissac, which the captain of the guards thought proper to do in spite of the instructions he had received from the prince, his master.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEDALLION MAKES MISCHIEF.

FOR some days the king had been at Trianon and Versailles in a calmer state of mind. The news from Flanders was more favourable ; Villars had retired, and was succeeded by Marshal d'Harcourt.

It was a smiling April morning. Louis XIV. was seated upon a fauteuil of velvet near the glass door of his apartment, which led to the garden ; all its sweets lay before him.

The king was thoughtful ; from time to time he opened and shut a little morocco box which lay upon the table. The king was so occupied that he had not heard some one who entered the apartment and had quietly seated themselves behind the fauteuil, and his astonishment was great when he heard a voice exclaim—

‘Grandpa, did you wish to see me ?’

‘My daughter,’ answered the king, turning his head in a lively manner, ‘I did not know that you were there, *mignonne*.’

‘You were so absorbed in your own reflections, sire. But shall we not be gay to-day ?’

‘You know too well that you can do what you please with me, *mignonne*. Sit you down—sit you down, I have something to say to you.’

The duchess seized a large *tabouret*, and placing it at the king’s feet sat down, and began to plait the lace ruffles of her grandpa.

This childish playfulness pleased the old king, and well she knew it. Looking and listening to this darling duchess he could, for a while, forget the majesty of the throne, the affairs and vexations of domestic domination, and all the countless ills of life.

‘My dear child,’ said the fond parent, ‘you know my tender affection for you, and it is but truth to say that thou art every way worthy of it ; and the disloyal conduct of the Duke de Savoie, thy father, towards me has not had the least influence upon my heart in regard to thee. The Duke de Savoie has joined my enemies, and this may cost him dear ; but thou wilt not be the less cherished by France, which is thy true country, and one day will be thy kingdom.’

‘Grandpa,’ interrupted the charming duchess, ‘is this by way of a sermon ?’

‘Something in that way, *mignonne*,’ replied the king.

‘I wager, sire, that you have been with Cardinal de Noailles, poring over the benefices.’

‘No, my child, not so ; but with my ministers.’

‘Much the same thing ; quite enough to make you serious and sad. It is generally my fortune to visit you after this Torcy, Voisin, and, above all, after *otre vilain borgne*, de Pontchartrain, whom I cannot bear. But you have something to say to me, sire ?’

‘Yes, certainly, something serious enough ; but at least you will listen to reason ?’

‘Thanks for your compliment, grandpa. And now, sire, let us speak of grave things in a lively tone ; that may be easily managed with minds such as ours, at least by yours, grandpa.’

‘What flattering, *mignonne* ? Well, then, I must tell you

that if I were to believe certain persons I should suppress Marly.'

'Admirable ! See what it is to think deeply. The idea could only have been engendered in a head of wisdom. And the motive, sire—the motive ?'

'Because Marly is the assassin of etiquette, and etiquette is the safeguard of many reputations.'

'Then suppress Marly by all means, sire ; nay, more, Trianon also, and no more journeys to Fontainebleau.'

'Gently, gently, not quite so fast, my child ; the persons who spoke to me of reform are not ill-intentioned. They have alarmed themselves a little too much, perhaps. I think that quite possible ; however, you know what a hubbub was made the other day by the mad prank of that giddy-pated Fronsac. To fly from home on his wedding night, to arrive at Marly with his head crammed with folly, and then taking to the fields and forests, fly I know not whither. It is really intolerable, and then, to make it ten times worse, they dare to speak of my child in this jumble of intrigues. You must acknowledge, my *mignon*, that I am both good and patient not to be very angry. But the most serious part of the affair lies there. Look at it. This morning some person has brought hither this little box ; it contains a jewel forgotten, or, perhaps, given to some woman at a supper given at the Palais Royal. This jewel, or medallion, my daughter, must have belonged to you ; it contains your portrait in miniature, surrounded by brilliants —such a portrait as you bestow upon your ladies or your friends. I am greatly mortified by this matter. Some silly, wicked ideas were attached to the finding of this portrait, and it was strongly magnified in the eyes of *roués*—,that you may rest assured of. It is a piece of matchless impudence,

and Argenson' (president of police) 'will certainly catch the rogue one of these days, hide as he may.'

The Duchess of Burgundy was now grave to seriousness, ceased to play with the ruffles of her grandpa, and with a dignified air she said to the king—

'Dare I take the liberty, sire, of asking from whom you received this medallion ?'

'I have promised to keep that a secret ; replied Louis.

'Then, sire, your majesty will keep your word, and I will ask no more about their wicked intentions.'

'Right ; let us speak no more upon the hateful subject,' said the aged monarch, returning the portrait to his dear duchess.

A few minutes afterwards Madame de Maintenon was announced. The king received her with a smile upon the lip, which was near akin to sadness. She was pale and greatly agitated. Louis asked her some questions respecting St. Cyr, and her general health.

'Both well, sire, but at this moment there is one at Trianon who is truly desolate, and deserving of all your majesty's benevolence.'

'Ay, truly, and who may that be ?' inquired the king.

'The Duke de Richelieu,' replied the favourite. 'He has sought me in his grief, and has requested me to beg you will grant him an audience ; he is one of my oldest friends, and that you know, sire.'

'And of mine also, madame,' said the king ; 'let him come—let him enter.'

A gentleman of the chamber was called, instructed, and a few minutes afterwards, the old Duke de Richelieu appeared leaning upon his crutch, and hobbled up to the king.

‘Duke !’ cried Louis, ‘I have not seen thee this age.’

‘Ah, sire,’ said the gouty old duke, kissing the king’s outstretched hands.

‘What are your wishes, my dear duke ?’

‘Sire, I am here in person to demand justice against an ungrateful son—one who is unworthy.’

The king was ruffled, and began to pace the apartment with hasty strides. Madame de Maintenon lent her arm for the old Duke de Richelieu to support himself upon, and as for the Duchess of Burgundy, she stood apart near the glass door, leaning against a gigantic vase of porcelain, and mentally suffering from beholding this scene. After a few moments the king, continuing his hurried promenade, said—

‘I am not ignorant, my dear duke, of the strange conduct of your son towards Madame de Fronsac, Madame de Richelieu, and yourself ; but you know my repugnance at interfering in family quarrels. And in such a case I am sparing of *lettres de cachet* ; the Bastille is not a house of correction, sir, but a state prison. However, I will punish the Duke de Fronsac for he deserves it ; I will exile him to Guienne.’

‘Good ! sire,’ said the irritated father, ‘that is all I require. After the contempt he has evinced for all of us, he has now set off for his estate, setting my permission at defiance. If I do express myself severely, sire, against my own child, it is because he is still dear to me, and I would rather see him lose his head than live an undutiful, dis-honoured life. Sire, his audacity is great, and your majesty cannot be ignorant that an illustrious name has been spoken of with slander.’

The king suddenly halted at these words, his anger was irrepressible ; he could not hide nor did he attempt to

stem his passion ; from time to time he stamped upon the inlaid floor with impatience and irresolution. Madame de Maintenon with downcast eyes kept silent, according to her usual habit when it was necessary to urge the king to extremity. Suddenly the Duchess of Burgundy, quitting her uneasy position, advanced within three paces of the king ; she was very pale, and a suppressed tear trembled in her eye, when, making a profound reverence to her grandfather she said—

‘Perhaps I ought to retire, sire, but if you will admit one who loves you dearly to offer her advice, she would declare that in her opinion it would be the height of injustice for the severity of the king to be resorted to in private family disputes, and as to what regards my name, it is placed on too lofty a summit to be injured by the foul breath of wicked slander.’

The good genius of Fronsac departed when the duchess quitted the apartment of the king. Madame de Maintenon and the old Duke de Richelieu remained for a considerable time. Cold considerations took place of the soft influence of wisdom. The king was induced to feel himself offended in the person of the Duchess of Burgundy, and the affair of the duel, of which he was now informed, decided him.

It is said that on this day the apartment of the charming Duchess of Burgundy was closed against every one, and that she received no visitor until the next day, except Madame de Ludre, her lady of honour and *confidante*.

CHAPTER VIII.

HUNTED DOWN.

AFTER passing twenty-four hours at the Hotel de Cossé, the Duke de Fronsac deemed it prudent to quit Paris.

He knew that his greatly-irritated father was in search of him, and he sent Georges to search the environs for a *maisonnette* at once quiet and secluded. The faithful follower returned, and under the shadows of the evening he placed his master in a common post carriage. This vehicle took the route of the Rue St. Antoine. The weather was delightful, and many pretty females were seated before their little *banquises* to enjoy the fresh air.

Fronsac could not refrain from poking his head out of the carriage window to admire and smile upon these pretty *grisettes*. Such was his naturally amorous temperament, that his passion for the one loved object did not absorb it, and yet this passion was ardent and devoted, and its cause he was ready to submit to extremity. In the world there are many people of this class, perhaps more than are suspected. One may talk of exclusive and absolute love, but O ! misery of heart, this love does not exist.

Doubtless many persons will be ready to term this blasphemy, but they would be wrong. With a little cool reflection they will soon discover the fragility of this boundless love, which they believe themselves to feel.

A *deathless* love is a thing more rare and more precious than the finest diamond ; we must perforce admit this sad

truth—ought we to blush with shame for advancing it ? Reader, look around thee, collect names, dates, facts ; think of the past, look at the present, and then pronounce. What is a passion ? Let the period of our life be what it may, it is not a religious but an idolatrous species of worship, a fairy dream—a fancy ! Sometimes the effect of vanity, sensuality, and nearly always a frightful egotism.

The carriage of the young Duke de Fronsac arrived at the end of the Rue St. Antoine without accident. Near to the Bastille was stationed a piquet of cavalry ; and now some agents of the police made a sign to the coachman to hasten, they had a prisoner in charge.

Fronsac ventured to take one peep, and by the light of the torches he saw an escorted carriage in which was seated the Count de Riom, and an officer of police ; starting as if he had beheld the Evil One himself, Fronsac shrank back into the corner of the carriage, telling Georges in a hurried voice to bid the coachman not to spare the lash.

The gloomy pile of the Bastille, with its numerous turrets and dismal vaults, was enough to chill the stoutest heart. Georges tried to calm his master, but the duke answered, ‘Silence ! The fellow whom Argenson’s myrmidons are now dragging to his dungeon was my antagonist.’

The carriage proceeded at a swifter pace to the Porte St. Antoine. Several of the police were there ; one of them stopped the horses, whilst another opened the coach-door.

Georges wore a brown habit with silk buttons ; he was without a sword ; he had a mild eye, fresh colour, and gentle manners, and might easily have been mistaken for an abbé.

‘Well, gentlemen,’ said he to the police, in his most insinuating tone, ‘what is your pleasure ?’

‘We regret having to disturb you, Mons. Abbé, but our duty compels us to search your carriage for one we want.’

‘I should think, gentlemen, that neither me nor my *pupil* will be found in your warrant of arrest, and I hope you will not delay our journey, but allow us to pass the barriers, for my pupil is a poor invalid.’

Presence of mind in cases of danger may be compared to a coat of mail ; had Georges lost his coolness, in five minutes he and his master would have been cooped up in the Bastille ; on the contrary, the policeman civilly closed the door, and the carriage proceeded.

The Duke de Fronsac pressed his faithful valet’s hand without daring to whisper a word. When they were safe upon the highway, they laughed aloud in exultation, for the Bastille had disappeared like one of those fantastic castles which one sees in the ever-changing sky, and which a breath of wind causes to melt away.

Between Villeneuve-St.-Georges and Corbail, that delightful little town which has the appearance of rising out of the Seine, is a valley surrounded by lofty woods, secluded, and charming, as a modest nymph of the mountains, ignorant of her beauty. At this time there was only one *châtelet* situated near to a stream, which hasted to hide itself amidst the root-tangled banks of the oak forest. Now this valley is filled with a number of *villettes*—very pretty, it must be allowed, but they have completely disenchanted the valley.

Georges had rented for his master apartments in the Château de Crosne, from the farmer who was in charge of it.

When the carriage arrived there it was yet early in the

night, and the coachman, with his carriage, was discharged. Fronsac passed for a young invalid whose life was despaired of.

The farmer and his kind-hearted wife were already disposed to pity his fate, but Georges had taken good care secretly to provide a good stock of choice wine and eatables. And all was admirably managed so as to pass fifteen or twenty days free from the fears of paternal fury, or of the lieutenants of the police. The travellers enjoyed their snug private supper, the night passed quietly, and the following morning was a *fête de printemps*. The young duke was anxious to take a peep round the neighbourhood, but before he sallied forth, he gave himself a jaundiced sickly hue, by applying a light wash of saffron to his features and hands. The daughters of the farmer sighed with compassion as he passed.

Fronsac had brought some books with him from the Hotel de Cosse—Virgil, his study and delight; Memoirs of De Retz, whose work spoke of the young duke's great-uncle, the *grand cardinal*; some romances of Madame de Scuderi, Molière, and the Phèdre of Racine—with these for companions he hoped to pass his time agreeably.

He amused himself with reading, morning and evening, sometimes stretched under a cherry-tree, sometimes on the banks of the brawling stream. One afternoon, about four o'clock, he saw approaching towards him an ecclesiastic, his breviary under his arm, with cast down eye and pensive air. This was the first visit he had received during the week of his retreat, at the moment he was reclined under the thick shade of a willow.

The abbé appeared to be startled by the sudden appearance of Fronsac, but he shortly recovered himself upon

seeing the mild physiognomy of the young man, whom, probably, he took to be the master of the place, and to whom he now began to apologise.

‘Sir,’ said the young duke, ‘I am an invalid to whom the air of the country is prescribed. I have lodgings in this valley, and my name is Armand de Boissy.’

The abbé appeared to be struck with the frank manners of the young invalid, and he began to chat with him, first upon his malady, and then upon literature.

Fronsac said that he was suffering from an affection of the liver. The abbé was learned, and he entered upon a scientific dissertation upon this organ of the human body. Fronsac’s fears took the alarm lest he might betray himself to this learned leech, and therefore he contrived to turn the discourse upon Virgil ; but here again he found the abbé quite as much at home in Latin and Greek as in French, for he boldly commented on the prince of poets like a doctor of the Sorbonne.

‘*Ventrebleu !*’ said the duke to himself, ‘if this man is my neighbour, I may as well surrender to my father and that clever fellow Argenson.’

In order to arrest the tide of Latin with which he was fairly inundated by the reverend poet, he requested the pleasure of his company at supper. This was playing a desperate game, but in such cases one often plunges out of the mud only to sink deeper in the mire.

With a profusion of thanks the abbé refused the invitation ; it was then nearly five o’clock, and he expected a visit from his *confrère* at his little cottage, which stood at the distance of about half a league.

‘Perhaps,’ added the abbé, with a knowing look, ‘you may have heard speak of him, for he is a very distinguished

character, far above me by rank and birth—he is called the Abbé Polignac.'

Upon hearing this name the young duke was thunderstruck, for the Abbé Polignac was connected with the Duke and Duchess de Richelieu, and was well known to the world of Versailles.

'Polignac!' replied Fronsac, affecting an air of great indifference, 'I have not the honour of knowing him.'

'Indeed, sir! what a pity! He shall visit you in the morning—he will be quite delighted to make the acquaintance of a young man so gifted, so talented as you are.'

'For heaven's sake, sir, spare me this honour!' replied Fronsac; 'the sight of a stranger quite overcomes me, and—and—I suffer so much, solitude is necessary to me; though really I have received great pleasure in meeting with you, sir, and hope to have the felicity of soon seeing you again, but alone—I pray you to come alone.'

The abbé made his *congé* with finished politeness and departed, bearing his breviary under his arm.

Fronsac hastened to the château, where he related his strange adventure to the faithful Georges, who, with uplifted hands, appeared delighted that he had escaped so well.

'You ought to be thankful, my lord duke; and now you must suddenly be worse than ever. Do not go out so fearlessly, or rather, let us cut and run, let us hide ourselves without delay in Guienne.'

'How? What for the Duke de Richelieu to march and besiege me in my own castle—storming it, and slaying my poor peasants? In the name of morals and the king—thank you, Georges, but, taking all things into consideration, I may as well brave the Latin of the learned abbé.'

The next day the young duke contented himself with a

walk in the garden of the château—for the apparition of the evening had shaken his courage a little. He was quietly seated in a little verdant bower at the feet of a Flora in marble, when Georges suddenly appeared, quite out of breath.

‘My lord—my lord,’ said he, gasping, ‘a carriage !’

Fronsac started upon his feet like a man surprised by the sudden howling of wolves ; his first thought was to spring over the fence, and fly into the woods. He paused a few moments, and after a minute’s reflection he marched directly to the château, passed into his apartment, and armed himself with his sword.

The carriage approached; already had it gained the chestnut avenue. Fronsac, who had an eye to what was passing, hid behind the jalousies of the window. To his great surprise, instead of an officer of police he saw an elegant female descend, quite alone, from the carriage. He threw down his sword and ran to receive her. She was already in the vestibule of the house, and the young duke was ready to drop when he recognised the visage and figure of the Duchess de Fronsac, his wife.

‘How, madame ! you here ?’ said he, in accents of amaze.

‘Yes, my lord ; but pray, compose yourself, for I am quite alone.’

He handed her into the saloon. Fronsac now felt that all his presence of mind would be required, and he prepared himself for the combat, but in a spirit of courtesy, and he was polite even to gallantry ; and the young duchess looked charming through her paleness and melancholy ; without being regularly beautiful she had most expressive features, and a lovely complexion.

The young duchess seated herself upon a fauteuil, then hiding her emotion with her handkerchief, she shed a torrent of tears.

Fronsac remained for some time before her, and then began to pace the room with hasty step. Something must be said, but who should speak first? At last Fronsac, being annoyed by her tears, impatiently broke silence.

‘Your visit, madame,’ said he, ‘charms me as much as it surprises me. I will not ask who informed you of my retreat; and if I did probably you would not tell me. Doubtless, madame, you may think that you have much to reproach me with, and I am not ignorant that I am blamed by many—for certain persons look upon me as a dangerous character, capable of every enormity—they really do me much honour. As for others, who are more reasonable, I respect them infinitely, and I wish with all my heart to regain their friendship. But I desire your pardon, madame, above all others, for certainly—you—are a charming and noble creature, worthy of all affection, and no one is more ready to admit this than I am, and what is breaking my heart and killing me is to think that the husband they have given to you is precisely the man of all others that they ought not to have made choice of. No, madame, I was not worthy of you, and I frankly acknowledged this; but alas! my father and your mother were pitiless, they induced the king to interfere, violated the altar by sacrificing us both. It is a misfortune that I shall deplore all my life.’

Fronsac ceased to speak, but paced the room with more rapid step. Madame de Fronsac still remained silent, hiding her tears with her handkerchief, and leaning for support upon the arm of the fauteuil. At last she ven-

tured to raise her beauteous eyes, humid with tears, and looked towards heaven with touching sadness.

The young duchess adored her husband, and she said with plaintive voice—

‘Pray go on, my lord. I—I—I—’

‘Good heavens, madame !’ cried Fronsac, ‘you will break my heart. I swear to you that at this moment I am truly miserable.’

The young duchess smiled bitterly, and replied—

‘And I, sir—what am I ? But no matter for me, let me now devote myself to your safety. Your retreat is discovered. Argenson has informed the Duke de Richelieu, and they will certainly arrest you. Your father has determined upon a suspension of twenty-four hours, and I am here secretly to inform you of your danger. Fly, sir—fly to another country. Fly, fly ! Alas, fly from me !’

Tears choked her voice. Fronsac, greatly affected, approached her, took her hand, and, with an expression resembling tenderness, he said—

‘This is generous, angelic, madame, and touches me to the heart. You have a noble soul, and are a distinguished, excellent woman, and I lament when I think how unworthy I am of you. Oh, madame, do not weep !’ and kneeling, he kissed her hand respectfully.

‘Rise, sir !’ said she, ‘unfortunate that I am, I have nothing to pardon. To pardon is to have a right, it is to exercise a power. And what am I to you ? or what are you to me ? It is with a fatal passion in your heart that you have espoused me. You have not left me in ignorance of that. I would willingly annul our marriage, spite of the silly preference of my heart, but by proposing this I might set my family against me, and they would

refuse my prayer. But I have not done so, you will say. No, I have not. Why? Because I still hoped in the future—one is so credulous, so superstitious, when one loves! It lends such courage, such strength, and led on by hope, how delightful appear the most rugged roads to a fancied region of happiness, and one is silly enough to hope for almost a moral impossibility. This is exactly my case, my fault, if it deserve that harsh name; a fault which I must expiate by my tears in the midst of the observant world, or through the grate of a cloister. Rouse yourself, my Lord Fronsac, and haste to depart, whilst you are yet free. I say, fly! They have already arrested Monsieur de Riom, for the language he made use of against the Court at the *cabaret*, and for his duel with you. The chief accusation against you is having given rise to suspicions of gallantry, and for having had in your possession a certain medallion; for having been the champion of an august princess, and for having drawn your sword on her behalf.'

‘Madame,’ said Fronsac, ‘you generously omit my true crime, which is a want of affection for a woman so truly worthy of being beloved as you are. This might be a legitimate cause for the anger of the king, and of my father—this crime, or rather let me say misfortune, believe me I would gladly expiate by the greatest tortures. I allude to that fatal passion which I am compelled to confess before you. Yes, that devouring chimera which preys upon my heart. I rashly dared to gaze upon the brilliant lightning, and I have been blinded by its lustre, scorched by its ardent fire—’

‘Alas! ’ cried the young duchess, pressing the hands of her husband. ‘I pity you the more, because I see no remedy for your misfortune. On one part what sacrifices;

on the other what gratitude! If we examine into them perhaps they would terrify you.'

'Madame,' said Fronsac, 'become more calm; passion seldom calculates, but courts all and foresees nothing.'

'Probably,' replied the duchess, 'and therefore the greater your misfortune. Are you beloved? Let us even suppose so. Have you had no predecessors?'

A little acidity began to mix itself with this strange interview, which had commenced under better auspices. Fronsac, wounded in the most sensible part, arose, and began again to pace the apartment, smiling with a proud and spiteful smile.

'It is very possible, madame, that I may deserve your pity, but at present that is not fully proved, and—'

'Self-love, sir!' interrupted the duchess. 'Ah, allow me then to tell you that I have little faith in the purity of this devouring flame that you but now spoke of. The passions of the soul are allowed the mastery without a struggle, and may urge their victim to deeds that may dis honour him. My lord, let us hope that one day or other your eyes may be opened to this.'

'Hope it, madame,' replied Fronsac, in a colder tone, 'and you certainly are powerful enough to operate such a miracle.'

The young duke smiled as he said this, and, his duchess thought, with irony, and she instantly arose determined to part. Fronsac gave her his hand and led her out, thanking her in the most polite terms for her friendly visit, and the nobleness of her proceeding, and promising to write to her as soon as he had crossed the frontier.

The duchess entered her carriage, received the last adieu of her husband, with tears in her eyes.

When Fronsac returned to his apartments, he found Georges busy in examining a little casket.

‘Georges !’ said the duke, ‘she has spoiled a good cause by pleading it too well. I swear to thee that I had begun to feel sorry for her.’

‘My lord,’ replied Georges, ‘her grace, the duchess, is a most admirable woman ; see what she has left here for you,’ and at the same time he opened the casket, which was filled with gold and precious gems.

“They are for his service in a foreign land,” said the duchess.

Fronsac recognised the jewels as his wife’s, and a movement of gratitude caused him to fly to the avenue, but the carriage was already out of sight.

Fronsac returned and said to Georges—

‘The gold I will accept, but thou must instantly return with these diamonds to Paris.’

Georges departed, and the farmer’s family attended at the supper.

The evening was delightful, never had he observed the rays of the setting sun more beautiful ; and the breeze was, refreshing which blew across the water from the meadows.

Fronsac’s spirits being now in a calmer state, he seated himself at a table near to the door, which led to the garden. He delighted in the air, and in the perfume of the flowers.

The sun had sunk to light another hemisphere, and the veil of night began to shadow the earth.

Lights were placed upon the table, but as the evening was calm the glass door remained open.

Fronsac hoped that Georges would return from Paris by about eleven o’clock. He had two commissions to execute there for the duke his master—to deliver the

diamonds, and to bring back with him a travelling chaise. The duke intended to quit the Château of Crosne about midnight, on his way to a foreign kingdom—but he had not breathed one word of his intention.

The farmer came in to announce the arrival of an ecclesiastic.

This visit annoyed the young duke ; but it was still early, only eight o'clock, and he hoped his guest would depart long ere the return of Georges.

The abbé entered and Fronsac, who had risen to receive him, invited him to stay and sup with him.

The good man accepted the invitation, and they sat face to face like old friends.

‘I must say, Monsieur de Boissy,’ said the abbé, ‘that I was led on by a fortunate star. I am starving with hunger, for I am returning from Villeneuve on foot on my way home. What a delightful abode you have made choice of—it is the retreat of a sage !’

The babble of the abbé annoyed Fronsac, who thought within himself—

‘To-morrow evening you may find somewhere else to sup, my dear abbé.’

‘I think you are looking a little sad and pale this evening, my very good friend—have you suffered more than customary pain ? The liver is an organ——’

‘Oh, for heaven’s sake ! my good abbé, leave my poor liver at rest—let the organ organise itself as it may ; for my part I will defy it, and eat and drink in spite of my liver.’

‘Ha ! ha !’ said the abbé, ‘but I glory in seeing you thus. Hypochondria is a malady of the stupid man ; the man of lively intellect chases it from him—if he must die he departs serenely—is it not so ? *Justum et tenacem.*’

‘You are very learned, M. Abbé,’ said Fronsac; ‘quite a Roman at Latin! but I pray you condescend to tell me in homely French what may be the news of the day?’

‘Nothing very wonderful, my dear friend—merely a sneaking adventure of Count de Riom, who has been laid fast by the heels for this some days past in the royal safe, generally called the Bastille. There is a story of a *cabaret* where the name of a great princess was compromised, and a few thrusts of the sword was the consequence—all owing to the folly of youth; but a little of the mad blood was let to flow.’

Fronsac, who was nearly cured of the wound in his arm, thought it felt as if it had re-opened at this minute, but with an air of indifference he replied—

‘The poor, unfortunate devil!—and pray against whom did he fight?’

‘My dear sir, my sacred character does not permit me to recount the thousand scandalous details of this wretched affair; but I daresay you know that this Riom is in great favour with a certain party at the Palace Royal, and, above all, with a very high and powerful lady, who is a relation, and also an enemy, of the Duchess of Burgundy, who is an angel.’

‘Your very good health, sir,’ interrupted Fronsac; ‘I am sure you speak like an angel, but pray continue.’

‘Yes, she is an adorable princess.’

‘Ay, adorable!’ replied the young duke, sighing.

‘And adored!’ added the abbé.

‘Bah! and by whom?’ demanded the other.

‘Have you never heard speak of that wild blade, the young Duke de Fronsac?’

‘Nonsense! to be sure I have. Is it he who adores her?’

But tell me, my dear abbé, is he thought to be loved in return ?'

‘Why, for that matter, you must know that people are of different opinions. The fact is, that this Duke de Fronsac is a spirited fellow, and in defence of the Duchess of Burgundy, for some words spoken in a low kind of wine-house, actually went out with Riom to endeavour to cut each other’s throat, but between you and I, I believe they were both either drunk or mad, to attempt to slash at each other’s throat by the light of the stars. However, one is now safe in the Bastille, and the other is wandering in the woods. Here’s to your health ; I pledge you, Monsieur de Boissy.’

‘Sir, you are very polite !’ and they drank bumpers.

‘Your news is really very amusing !’ said Fronsac ; ‘but my opinion is that the little duke will take special good care of himself.’

‘I am quite of your opinion,’ replied the abbé, ‘though I have heard that Argenson has very keen eyes, and employs some smart fellows.’

Fronsac felt a cold shiver which ran from head to foot and he only replied by another bumper.

The evening was advanced ; there was no appearance of Georges, and the abbé continued to eat and to drink. Fronsac began to feel uneasy. The farmer’s daughter entered at this moment to whisper a word to Monsieur de Boissy. The farmer was so surprised that he let some of the plates fall that he was about to carry out.

‘My good girl,’ said Fronsac, giving her a little brilliant which he wore upon his finger, ‘I thank thee ; thou art as good as thy visage is charming.’

The young girl blushed, and flew out of the room ; the

abbé rather quailed, for the ardent eyes of his young host were fixed upon him. Suddenly Georges burst into the room, crying—

‘Monsieur, the house is surrounded by mounted police, and dragoons ; they have seized the post-chaise which I brought with me. Fly ! fly ! and save yourself, my lord !’

The abbé had risen from his seat at the same moment with Fronsac, and tearing off his little *collet*, and hastily unbuttoning his great black coat, he displayed beneath the uniform of an officer of the State police.

‘Ah, wretch !’ cried Fronsac, hurling a bottle at his head, which, fortunately for the false abbé, missed its aim. The duke then flew into the next room and snatched at his arms. There was no possibility of escape by the window, for the house was surrounded with guards.

‘Georges, to the rescue ! Help, help !’

The faithful Georges was already in the hands of the police. The false abbé had disengaged himself of his disguise ; they had given him his sword, and he entered the duke’s room, sword in hand, followed by eight or ten of his party armed to the teeth.

‘My Lord Duke de Fronsac, I call upon you in the king’s name to surrender.’

‘Yes,’ cried Fronsac, ‘after I have blown thy brains out.’

And finding a pistol he broke the jaw of one of Argenson’s myrmidons. Then they rushed upon him, and although he handled his sword like a brave knight, he was compelled to surrender. Then they seized, disarmed, and dragged him to the post-carriage which Georges had brought with him from Paris. Master and man were then handcuffed.

The police had discovered the duchess’s visit to her husband, and, in consequence, an order had been given to

arrest the duke without further delay, lest he might make his escape.

The farmer's family surrounded the chaise with tears in their eyes ; the little children were inconsolable, and thrust out their hands to bid adieu to the poor prisoner ; the blunt farmer himself had tears in his eyes of rage and sorrow.

The moment was come when the crest-fallen young duke must bid adieu to the peaceful solitude of the valley, to the château, trees, murmuring streams, and all the perfumed airs of spring, and jocund liberty.

The chaise with its armed guard departed at full gallop, and in little more than two hours afterwards, the lively and handsome young Duke de Fronsac was a sad prisoner in the gloomy Bastille.

The report arrived at Versailles on the following day, but the king only evinced his silent displeasure at the news. Madame de Maintenon sighed, but it was with satisfaction. The Duke de Richelieu pacified himself by thinking of the great necessity of this severe lesson to his undutiful son.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE BASTILLE.

THE young prisoner had now mourned his captivity more than a month. He occupied an apartment situated in the western tower. This cell was about twelve feet square, and was sumptuously furnished for the Bastille ; it contained a small bed of white wood, an oak table, a coffer for his wardrobe, and three rush-bottomed chairs.

The Duke de Fronsac was treated like a prisoner of State. Georges was only allowed to visit the Bastille every second day, but he was never allowed to approach his master until he had been diligently searched, and the same precautions were taken before he was allowed to leave this gloomy prison.

Fronsac had one window, secured by enormous bars of iron through which he might breathe the air, and salute the rays of the setting sun, that friend of the solitary captive.

From this loophole the young duke might amuse himself with taking a bird's-eye view of Paris, and the blue hills which bounded the horizon. Of St. Germain, Marly, Versailles, he thought a thousand times a day. He envied the gay lark, carolling free in mid-air. By day he breathed his sad complaints to spring's stranger, the swallow, as she flitted by, and to the passing clouds and twinkling stars by night ; his heart panted for liberty, and his nervous hands clasped his prison bars often in despondency.

The poor, secluded wretch forms strange acquaintances —a plant, a weed, a mouse, nay, a very spider, becomes a familiar friend. Man, left thus to himself, acquires instinct and intelligence.

Fronsac had hitherto doubted or given no thought to the mysterious affinities which doubtless exist amongst all created beings. Naturally ardent and impetuous, he had hitherto luxuriated on the present.

One morning, his roaming, listless eye rested upon a tuft of wallflower, which grew amongst the jointed stones of his prison house, and he became strangely interested in examining and admiring a large and brilliant drop of water which the rain had left upon one of the sweet scented flowers of this plant. The rain-drop was beautifully pell-mell, and sparkled like a diamond ; it waved upon the velvet leaves of the wallflower which played with the breeze, falling back into the centre of the petals, again to be displaced, and tremble upon the outer edge of the saffron-coloured leaf, as if fearful of falling from the giddy height of a hundred and fifty feet into the profound moat of the fortress.

Fronsac said to himself—

‘ Oh ! how I wish I could gather that flower with its jewelled drop, and save from the gulf its prismatic charms ! Heigh, ho ! how happy it would make me ! ’

And as he continued to look upon the humid pearl, he was induced to prognosticate his own future destiny by the fate of this fragile drop of water ; misfortune makes us superstitious. But be not humiliated, ye poor prisoners ! Are we not all, in one way or another, fellow-sufferers ? In the overflowing well of prosperity the soul becomes petrified.

Perhaps it is better to believe in spirits—genies, in the influence of the stars, or destiny, than dose away time under a golden canopy—a heavy, earthy materialist.

But still better would it be to elevate the soul to such a height of faith, and hope, that all human events, let them be fortunate, or otherwise, should not have power to distract it from the duties of sublime adoration.

Fronsac, the slave of effervescent passions, had neglected or forgotten a future state, whilst occupied with the vain pleasures of the world.

The young duke now passed his hands through the bars towards the flower, with as much precaution as if it had been to save an infant's life ; his pulse beat with violence, his eyes were fixed, and a cold sweat bathed his fine forehead.

'If the drop should fall into the abyss ! if I cannot save this pearl, the image of my own frail life, in peril of its dissolution ! oh ! it will be frightful !' Stretching out his arm he found it within his reach, and pausing, said, 'But if I can secure it, and bear it safe into my cell, if I am enabled to place it under a glass, and for a time shelter it from the rude blast, and from instant annihilation, happy thought ! what a delightful presage, what angelic love will await my speedy delivery from this dreadful Bastille !'

Poor romantic prisoner ! His agitated fingers touched the stem of the wallflower, he delicately broke off the branch upon which the sparkling drop still trembled upon the velvet petals, it was saved ! When at that moment the bolts of his cell creaked harshly, the door suddenly flew open, his hand trembled, the brilliant drop glided from the flower, lingered, as if it would give a parting kiss, and then his fluid gem fell, and was no more.

Fronsac gave a cry of despair; the gaoler flew to him for he fancied he had loosed a bar, and was about to hurl himself from the casement. The solid bars reassured him after having carefully examined them, and he had time to reflect upon the strange humour of the prisoner, who had thrown himself upon his hard, flinty couch.

‘By St. Dennis and Notre Dame!’ exclaimed the vigilant turnkey, ‘but you alarmed and terrified me, monsieur.’

‘And, alas! you have seriously injured me.’

‘Injured? Holy Virgin! why I merely touched you.’

‘You have broken my heart.’

‘Are you mad, or only mischievous? Take care, take care, there are such things as chains in the Bastille.’

‘Chains, miscreant?’ cried Fronsac, starting from the couch, ‘chains! Is it not enough to coop me up here in this den like a wild beast, or a vile criminal? What injury have I done to thee, thou hangman’s valet?’

The gaoler had fastened the door within, and, retreating into a corner of the apartment, drew his enormous sword, for in the first transport of his fury Fronsac had seized a chair, which he vigorously twirled around his head; but suddenly pausing, he replaced it by his bed, and resumed his more serene attitude.

‘Bah! said he, ‘sheath thy sword! thou hast nothing to fear, thou art only a servile brute, and must obey thy master; perhaps it is thy duty to be harsh and cruel. I will not break thy bones—nay, once out of this Bastille, I should speedily forget that thou ever existed. But I repeat, thou hast done me a serious injury.’

‘Poor fellow! poor fellow! his brain is certainly touched,’ muttered the gaoler to himself, setting some poringers, and bread and wine upon the table; it was the

prisoner's dinner. Fronsac was feverish and lay upon his couch ruminating over his sad fate until evening.

The following day Georges arrived, and was guarded into his master's apartment. The gaoler left them alone, having first warned the *valet-de-chambre* that the duke might show his teeth.

‘Pooh !’ said Georges. ‘I am in no fear.’

‘Have a care ! have a care !’ replied the turnkey ; ‘he might bite.’

Fronsac, hearing this, could not help laughing, and when the man of keys had left them he related to Georges the scene of the evening, but without saying a word about the drop of water.

‘Take care, my lord,’ said Georges ; ‘the governor has received very strict orders respecting you. Your arrest has made much noise ; the poltroons and the spiteful have all let their tongues loose, and say a thousand falsities of you, my lord.’

‘And my father ?’ said Fronsac.

‘He is sad and silent, my lord. The Duchess de Richelieu is cold and distant, and the Duchess de Fronsac weeps eternally.’

‘And the king, Georges ?’

‘Monsieur Brissac informed me, my lord, that the king has never made one single inquiry respecting you.’

‘What ! not once ? The king ! a king who is so great, and so good totally to forget me, in this infernal cage ; whilst I am ready to devote, to sacrifice myself for him in Spain, or in Flanders ?’

‘Rather, my lord, live for him in France ; you will not remain here long—’

‘What sayest thou, Georges ?’

‘ Yesterday I was at Versailles, my lord.’

‘ What happiness for thee, Georges ! Thou hast seen Versailles—what a fairy scene is Versailles !’

‘ I believe, my lord, you were only once there ?’

‘ Thou art right, but once ; but that once, alas ! may never return, it was too delightful ; but, prithee, go on.’

‘ I spoke with several of the under officers of the palace. A running footman of the Duchess of Burgundy informed me that he had carried several letters from her to your father, the Duke de Richelieu.’

‘ Heaven bless her, she is an angel !’ cried Fronsac ; ‘ but I fear my father is inflexible.’

‘ Think you, my lord, that he would keep you all your life here ?’

‘ No, but perhaps for all his—’

‘ Ah ! my lord duke, the visit which you received at the Château of Crosne might have made all things easy, have set everything to rights—is it so very hard a case then to allow oneself to be seduced by a wife, so young and charming as yours is ? Only think how easily everything might be arranged, and your pardon and return to Versailles insured, if you would but act the husband, or even the lover, from your retreat.’

‘ May be so, may be so,’ said Fronsac hastily ; ‘ and enough said. My heart is my own : what has any king to do with it ? But thou hast not said one word of my friends, particularly of my good and dear maréchale.’

‘ The Duchess de Noailles frequently visits the Duchess of Burgundy, my lord, and plans with her for your liberty ; and only yesterday she did me the honour of conversing with me respecting you, my lord. Amongst other things,

she asked me on which side was the window of your cell, and I explained everything.'

'The dear maréchale! and my telescope, Georges?' Fronsac uttered these last words with extreme vivacity, and was in visible anxiety.

Georges smiled.

'Victory, victory! my lord, I have cheated this cunning gaoler, and I have now about me a marine telescope.'

Fronsac was ready to embrace him. The possession of a telescope was a treasure—to extend vision, to be able to see what was passing at a remote distance, was no longer to vegetate in a sepulchre; true, he was still fettered to his prison, but he might prolong his chain at will.

In order to deceive the Cerberus, Georges had written upon the box of the telescope—for *M. le Gouverneur de la Bastille*, and carried it in hand. Consequently this morocco box had not been opened, and Georges carried it into the apartment of De Bernaville, and laid it down as if it were to be left in the antechamber as customary. When the guard by which he was attended thither had retired, Georges hastily slipped the box into his pocket, and instead of speaking of it to the governor, he had merely asked of him when he entered for some trifling matters for the duke; when the governor retired Georges was conducted forthwith to the cell of the Duke de Fronsac.

'Thou art a clever fellow, Georges,' said his delighted master, at the same time drawing out and adjusting the focus to his eye.

'An admirable fellow!' and with delirious joy he swept the horizon of all the quarters of Paris.

Georges listened with mole-like ear, for if the gaoler had entered all was lost; the telescope would have been

instantly seized, and Georges forbidden ever again to enter the Bastille.

The days passed like pale shadows, and now the poor prisoner has obtained permission to breathe a fresher air from the platform which crowned the tower.

This little *aerien* promenade was surrounded with battlements, but some loop-holes allowed some peeps upon the city and the country.

Here Fronsac passed entire hours watching the swallows skimming the surrounding air, sometimes disappearing behind the battlements, and again traversing the platform like flying arrows.

These little promenades were measured and limited, and when the allotted moment arrived, the merciless gaoler attended to bar him into his cell.

Fronsac knew that another prisoner preceded or followed him to *the garden*, as in speaking of this platform he chose to call it, but he had never met him.

The gaolers were cruelly severe, and remarkable for their discretion.

A prisoner in the Bastille might fancy himself the only one in this immense fortress, there reigned such a mysterious silence.

One day it came into Fronsac's head to write to the unknown, who like himself came to respire the air upon the summit of this tower.

He placed his little billet upon the stone seat, strewing over it some grass which he plucked from the chinks of the pavement.

The next day he found in the same place a corner of a handkerchief, with an embroidered cypher. The prisoner had neither pen, ink, nor paper; and from this circum-

stance Fronsac judged that he was still more severely treated than himself, and a tear of compassion fell from his eye upon his paper, upon which he traced the following words :—

‘ You will find paper and a pencil hidden in a fissure of the south battlement.’

Some days after this a correspondence was established ; the letter-box was admirably chosen.

This battlement had crevices in which several things might be hidden.

Fronsac was astonished at the beautiful writing of his companion in misfortune, as well as at the *laconisme* of the notes of the unknown, whilst Fronsac wrote entire pages.

He complained of this, but the answer was still more brief, for it contained merely the following words—

‘ I am accused of being a sorceress ! ’

‘ Holy Mary ! a woman ! ’ cried Fronsac. And already his thoughts were soaring in the region of romance.

He implored the *sorceress* to explain herself, and to put her to the proof he interrogated her as to his past and future life, to which she replied—

‘ You love where there can be no hope, and you would commence where others would be happy to terminate ; the proud heart shall be broken by misfortune. Better it is for you that you should remain under your bolts and bars than revisit the vain pomps in which you would gladly be an assistant. Write to me no more ; if this letter should fall into improper hands, perhaps I should be burnt alive upon the Place de Grève.’

On the night he received this strange epistle Fronsac could not sleep a wink, but passed the time in stalking about his cell like a phantom ; he often read over by the

pale light of his lamp this terrible letter, whose characters he began to fancy were traced in a colour resembling blood !

In a paroxysm of terror he burnt it and its ashes were carried away by the wind, which whistled through his prison bars, and Fronsac beheld it pass over his head like a flight of funeral birds.

A cold sweat bathed his limbs ; he threw himself upon his couch, dozed, started, awoke, with violent headache, thirst, and parched mouth, and on the following morning, when his gaoler visited him, he found him extended on his pallet of straw, pale and shivering.

A physician was sent for, Georges also arrived, and he thought his master in so great danger that he hastened to inform the duke's powerful friends.

The Duke de Richelieu had left Paris for one of his estates, taking with him his wife and the Duchess de Fronsac, towards whom they had to make use of gentle force. The poor young duchess adored her husband ; it was piteous to behold her drowned in tears—melancholy, proud, but resigned.

In the evening the faithful Georges returned ; he came from Versailles and had neither spared whip nor spur. He informed his master that he had seen Doctor Fagon, the Court physician, and that he had requested of him to obtain the king's permission to visit the Duke de Fronsac in the Bastille, and he had promised to make instant application.

Doctor Fagon kept his word, for about ten o'clock at night a noise of chains and the windlass of the portcullis was heard. The drawbridge of the Bastille was lowered ; it fell heavily upon the abutments of the fosse, and a carriage

entered the fortress. Such an event was almost a prodigy ; a fragile piece of paper, with the king's sign manual, had effected what would have been resisted at the cannon's mouth.

The newly arrived was Doctor Fagon ; the governor himself received him and attended him to the prisoner's cell. Fronsac was no longer delirious ; great weakness had succeeded to the nervous crisis ; he was very pale, with languishing eyes.

When he saw the confident looks, the majestic periuke, the ample black habiliments and the imposing figure of the doctor, he stretched forth his hands and smiled a welcome as to a returning friend whom he had despaired to see again. Doctor Fagon approached the bed, and greeted his patient with friendly words and more friendly looks ; for the governor was still present.

The prisoner frowned from time to time, and made impatient movements, which did not escape the quick eye of the doctor. He felt conscious of his power, and rising, he addressed himself to Count de Bernaville.

'My lord count,' said the doctor, 'the confessor and the physician have privileges which the king himself respects when occasion requires it.'

'I understand you, sir,' replied the governor, and drawing himself up to his full height, and laying his hand upon the guard of his heavy sword, he retired, preceded by the gaoler bearing a lanthorn, and followed by Georges.

'My dear duke,' said Doctor Fagon, when he saw himself alone with him—'good heavens ! what have you done that they should give you such a vile dog-hole of an apartment ? But how is it with you ? we must set you to rights.'

The doctor seated himself at the oak table, and scrawled

a long prescription ; this being finished, he returned to the invalid.

‘Doctor,’ said Fronsac, ‘do you think they will leave me here to die, or may I take your visit as a happy presage Doctor, I pray you tell the king of the horrors I suffer in this wretched place. Speak to him of yon bars, of these dreary walls, of my uneasy bed of straw ; oh, speak to him of my prison, of this infernal cell ! Tell him that it is a hundred times more cruel thus to let me die by inches, day by day, than to chop off my head at once.’

‘And that is just what I shall not say,’ replied the grave but sweet voice of Doctor Fagon. ‘My dear duke, if the lion seizes you by the arm, caress his great nervous paw instead of attempting to force it from him. Besides, you ought to know the king better ; this severity is contrary to the feelings of his heart, particularly towards you. But what could you expect ? At seventeen your gallantry is rather surprising—what will it be at twenty-five ? Your fine figure may flatter you, but let me tell you, young sir, it has given you many powerful enemies ; and they have brawled open mouthed at the first fault you have committed. Ah, duke, ought you to fly so far, or soar so high ?’

‘But, doctor, is it then entirely my fault ? What other could you have done in my place, doctor ?’

‘Me !’ said the grave Doctor Fagon, a good deal astonished at the question.

‘Yourself, O divine son of Esculapius !’

‘What do you think, duke ?’

‘What do I think ?’

‘Probably that if I were in your place, I, Doctor Fagon, physician to his sacred majesty, member of the four faculties of Paris, that——’

‘ You, Fagon,’ interrupted the young duke, ‘ with a greater share of brain than ever cogitated under a three staged perriwig, even you, dread doctor ! ’

‘ Why, really, duke, under similar circumstances I might find myself—that is, probably—but no, no——’

‘ Come, doctor, out with it ; you would have felt greatly flattered, and tickled, and—O most learned and inflexible of doctors ! they would have popped thee into this Bastille, you would have had a fever of chagrin, vexation, and impatience—mad with love, and a thirst of liberty. A prison fever, doctor ! and to cure that a rascally turnkey would be more potent than a learned doctor. Open ! open ! in heaven’s name open these hateful doors, and gates ! Let me spring four paces beyond the drawbridge, and I shall be mad with joy and renovated health. Ah ! if the king could see me from his charming cabinet at Versailles, he would surely pity me, would he not, doctor ? I am become so meagre, so wretched-looking, so miserable, so idiotic ! My rational ideas escape from me daily ; they fly through those frightful bars like a bird when its cage is opened. And there will soon remain no more of me than a wasted body and a delirious mind, and that will be an end of the tragedy. Madame de Maintenon, my *step-mother*, my father, and my other inveterates will be very happy then.’

‘ Compose yourself, my dear duke,’ said the doctor ; ‘ evince more command over yourself.’

‘ At Versailles perhaps I might, doctor, but here ! No, no, doctor, whisper ! I can no longer support the enormous weight of this Bastille upon my shoulders ; its ponderous walls are crushing me, destroying me—oh ! ’

‘ These ideas are purely the effect of your fever, my dear

duke ; you will quit this place before the season of roses is past.'

'God grant ! God grant ! But here is something which predicts the contrary. See ! see ! see ! it is enough to make one's very flesh to creep, and every hair to stand on end !'

Fronsac then related the history of the sorceress to the most trustworthy and discreet of doctors. He laughed, but could not but admit the reality of the writing, and it greatly surprised him.

'Now, doctor, what can this woman mean, and who can she be that predicts so sadly and solemnly ?'

'Why, my good friend,' replied the doctor, 'some one like yourself with a diseased brain. You will pardon me ? You fancy these walls are pressing you to death ; she sees sad trains and dismal tombs. Prison, prison, how barbarous is captivity ! I have as great a horror of it as you have, and yet we boast of having abolished slavery in France.'

'My dear Fagon, you are a jewel of a doctor, and one may place entire confidence in you.'

'I believe no one, my dear duke, will accuse me of betraying them.'

'Doctor, I have one question which my heart pants to ask you.'

'Well, well, don't agitate yourself so, duke, but out with it.'

'And you must reply without hesitation, without commentary or remark.'

'What is it ? You really terrify me.'

'When did you see the charming idol ?'

'I had the honour of seeing her this day, my friend,' replied the doctor hastily, not wishing Fronsac to pronounce the name.

‘To-day! let me look at you, my dearly beloved doctor. Oh, what happiness for you—what felicity! One more question.’

The doctor trembled; he was almost becoming a confidant. Fronsac was radiant with smiles, like an exile returning, and hearing from a distance the well-remembered tone of the musical bells of his native village.

‘Doctor,’ continued the young duke, ‘tell me, my oracle of doctors, did *she* know that you were about to visit me in the Bastille? Did she not deign to bestow one thought upon the poor prisoner?’

This was a home thrust. Fagon coughed and stammered, and ruffled his wig for some minutes. If at this moment he had been at the Hotel de Richelieu he would have seized his hat and cane, and disappeared in a twinkling; but as it was he had nothing for it but to cross his legs, throw himself back upon his chair, and close his eyes, probably to collect his thoughts, which at last he vented in these words—

‘I cannot deny, my lord duke, that—the—person in question did speak to me of you.’

Fronsac sprang from the bed to embrace the doctor, who coolly pushed him back and said—

‘So, so, the fever is returning.’

‘Well, well, well; see, I am quite calm. Now tell me, oh, tell me! unless you wish to see me expire, what did she say to you? None of your solemn, formal tones with your my lord dukes. In the name of heaven, do not ponder upon prudence and discretion! Have I not said that it will finish me if you do not speak? Speak on.’

‘I was standing in the gallery of the *chateau* with Maréchal my *confrere* after the king’s *levée*, when the person in

question passed by us on her way to the king's chapel, where she was going to hear mass, and seeing me she approached and said—

“ ‘Doctor, I have just heard that you are going to visit a prisoner in the Bastille ; the king has consented to it ; do not depart without having first spoken to Madame de Ludre.’ ” I bowed in silence.

‘ After the celebration of the mass Madame de Ludre came up to me, as I was going to make a visit at the house of the captain of the guards.

‘ She placed a little sealed *pacquet* in my hands, and whispered me to be discreet. “ The *pacquet* contains,” said she to me, “ merely a little of the *paste de jujube à la vanille*. ” ”

‘ And this *pacquet*, doctor ? ’ cried the impetuous young duke.

‘ Here it is, my lord duke,’ replied the doctor, and gravely taking a little box out of his pocket, he presented it to him.

Fronsac was about to break the seal, upon beholding which the doctor instantly rose to depart. Fronsac checked his burning curiosity, and placed the little box under his pillow.

Night shadowed the city of Paris with her mantle of darkness. The twinkling lights of the Bastille still shone through barred lattice and loophole, appearing to the benighted traveller like the manifold eyes of some gigantic monster. Eleven had tolled from the great bell of the central tower ; each tone vibrated to the lowest depths of the dungeons, and struck upon the ears of the sad prisoners. The guard and turnkeys made their nightly round, and might be followed by the tinklings of their bunches of enormous keys. One of them knocked at the door of Fronsac's cell. He announced to each prisoner that it

was time to extinguish all lights. The doctor took leave of Fronsac, and seeing the mental anxiety depicted upon his visage upon hearing the turnkey's order for blowing out the lamp, he said to this man—

‘The Duke de Fronsac must not be left in darkness ; he is in a dangerous state, and I will not answer for the consequence ; a lamp must be left with him. As the king's physician, I take the responsibility upon myself.’

After giving this order in an imposing but decided tone, Doctor Fagon pressed the young duke's hand, then hastily departed, fearing he might betray himself by his thanks, and not doubting that the poor young man was dying with desire to open the mysterious box.

CHAPTER X.

ESCAPE OF THE DUKE DÉ FRONSAK.

ABOUT this period a mournful event saddened the Court of France. The grand dauphin expired at Meudon. His malady had made such rapid progress, that at the expiration of three days the prince was in his mortal agony. As he was not in the good graces of the king, his father, he was mourned merely by a few of his personal friends. The Maréchal d'Huxelles, the Duke d'Antin, and the Marquis de Casan regretted him sincerely. Mademoiselle Choin, his mistress, found herself suddenly neglected in the house which she inhabited in the Rue Petit St. Antoine. This lady had been very moderate in the day of her prosperity, often feeling astonished herself at her singular good fortune, and she bowed to the advent of these days of solitude with philosophic resignation. As to the Mademoiselles de Lillebonne, daughters of a very good house, and to whom the favours of the prince had been considered so strange, one died shortly after him, and the other obtained the Abbey of Remiremont.

The Duke of Burgundy, by the death of his father now become the immediate heir to the crown of France, was surrounded by a crowd of adulators and sycophants.

He seemed to be fully aware of his new and lofty position, and the world was astonished to see him unfold a character, and display talents, which either from being naturally of a savage temper, or by affecting angry looks and harsh behaviour, he did not appear to possess.

Louis XIV loved his grandson sincerely. The interference even of Madame de Maintenon could not alienate this secret sympathy ; the king now began to treat him in a more affable manner, and often invited him into his cabinet, and there chatted with him familiarly. Another cause might be the fond tenderness of the king for the Duchess of Burgundy, and this was an additional guarantee of affection for the new dauphin.

The Duke de Beauvilliers, who now lived in retirement, saw his peaceful retreat invaded by a host of courtiers. Fenelon, the Archbishop of Cambray, received also frequent visits from the general officers of the army in Flanders.

Neither Beauvilliers nor Fenelon felt the least ambition to take advantage of the new position of their former pupil. They had devoted themselves to holy, peaceful retirement, fatigued and disgusted with frivolous honours, and cruel persecutions. The courtiers and the prime favourite had ceased to speak of *Telemaque* (which had as yet only appeared in manuscript) as a book of censure, insulting to the king.

But now many masks fell at Versailles, and there were those that were glad to seize upon them to hide their fluctuating visages.

The summer of this year had commenced in melancholy, for the death of the grand dauphin had clad it in mourning.

By degrees, however, Marly began to revive. True, they had not yet renewed the sprightly dance, but gayer sounds began to be heard, and the leaves were yet green.

The autumn was almost gay ! Louis was indignant at the perfidy and bitterness of the enemy towards France,

and he was furious at the artifices displayed by Austria. Villars-Vendôme, d'Harcourt, Barwick, and many others determined to avenge him.

Summer had passed ; autumn was flitting also away, for it was October ; the woods and groves were yet gay with varied tints of yellow, green, red-brown. The nightingale had long ceased her powerful notes, but in her place had left the more familiar warbler, the sweet cottage guest, the robin.

On one of these October days a lady, closely veiled, was introduced into an apartment of the dauphine's, the so late charming Duchess of Burgundy. It was in vain that the Mesdames de Ludre and de Levi assured this lady that the princess was at this moment at the house of Madame de Maintenon, at St. Cyr. The veiled lady with touching perseverance requested permission to await her return. Her light, elegant, youthful figure, and her suppressed sobs filled them with compassion, and they entreated her to calm herself ; the dauphine must speedily return, as she was to dine with his majesty.

Sometime after this a bustle was heard in the outer hall, then a clash of arms : it was the guard, saluting ; and the dauphine entered with majestic step.

The strange lady had thrown back her veil, and as the princess was about to enter the grand gallery, on the way to her own apartment, her eyes suddenly fell upon the stranger, and instantly recognised in her the young and beautiful Duchess de Fronsac, who arose, and stood pale and trembling, to make her reverence, leaning for support upon the friendly arm of Madame de Levi.

The princess advanced hastily towards her, took her by the hand, and led her towards her boudoir, which also

served her for oratory ; here she requested her to be seated, and soothed her with all the blandness of a friendly, kind heart ; there was a degree of witchery about the princess which was irresistible.

The Duchess of Fronsac was so overcome by her feelings that she had not the power of pronouncing one word ; she was come for the purpose of supplicating this most generous of women to obtain pardon for the Duke de Fronsac.

Her tears, and her nervous state, spoke volumes as to her feelings. The dauphine now also hung her head, and her customary flow of language had suddenly deserted her.

The mutual position of these two young women was explained by their silence.

At last, the dauphine of France sought refuge in her rank to hide her embarrassment, and hastily recovering her presence of mind, she said that she would instantly speak to the king, but that she feared the imprisonment of the young duke would only be exchanged for a long exile. Then she inquired with affected solicitude after the health of the Duke and Duchess of Richelieu.

‘Ah ! madame,’ sobbed out the young duchess, ‘why do you not love my mother ? She is so devoted to you, madame, and so greatly admires everything you do, that—’

‘My dear duchess,’ replied the charming dauphine, ‘though you believe in your heart that I am wickedness personified, you hope to soften me by your amiable flatteries ; but I know that not one of your family like or are devoted to me, but I will not refuse your petition on that account—one cannot remake the heart, therefore we must needs be contented with it, such as it is. If it depended upon myself, methinks I could feel attached towards you, if you would have less bitter thoughts towards me.’

‘Is it possible, madame—can your highness have formed such an opinion of me ?’

‘Hold ! hold, my dear duchess, and let us converse like two affectionate cousins, who have never rivalled each other. Now place your hand upon your heart, and tell me truly—have you not always detested me ?’

‘How, madame ! detested—’

‘When my name is pronounced, do you not feel a sudden beating of the heart ? are you not ready to fly at the bare mention of it ?’

‘I beseech your highness—’

‘And when any one is so forgetful as to praise me in your hearing, is it not enough to put you out of temper for the whole day ?’

‘I beseech your highness not to form such erroneous ideas.’

‘No, no—it is you who deceive yourself. I am frank and candid, and these are qualities at least of which I may be allowed to boast. Come now, if you will freely avow your antipathy towards me, I will instantly second your petition to the king, and in order to spare your mouth from making the painful confession here, place your left hand into mine, and that shall suffice to avow your mortal hatred.’

Then the pretty, engaging Duchess de Fronsac arose, and with charming grace she placed her *right* hand into that of the dauphine, and then gently pressed to her lips that royal hand.

‘Duchess, you are a dear, sweet creature !’ said the dauphine of France, ‘and I long to embrace you,’ and thus saying, she opened her arms and tenderly caressed her.

Whilst she yet remained in her embrace, Madame de

Maintenon entered without being announced, being one of the privileges which she chose to assume. She was an eye-witness of this reconciliation, and smiled with unfeigned delight.

The Duchess de Fronsac flew to embrace her, and to supplicate her support to the petition.

‘Dearest duchess !’ said the favourite in a grave tone, ‘heaven is my witness that I can do nothing for you to-day in this wicked affair. Your shocking husband has not left in one’s power to say anything in his favour.’

‘*Tante, tante !*’ replied the dauphine, ‘a poor prisoner should always claim your compassion. We shall intercede with the king for him, shall we not ?’

‘You had better attempt it alone, *mignon* ; you are very often queen of the king.’

‘It is true his majesty is very gracious to me.’

The dauphine pronounced these words in a very grave and serious manner, for the *tante* had pronounced her last speech in a sharpish and impatient tone.

They came to announce that it was near to the king’s dinner hour, and the dauphine was dressed in all haste before these ladies—Manon (Mademoiselle Balbien) was the smartest and most clever *femme-de-chambre* of the day—and in less than ten minutes the princess was in *grand habit*—Louis XIV always exacted this. Before quitting her apartment she turned to Madame de Fronsac, and said—

‘Remain here, my dear duchess, and I entreat you to compose yourself. I will send the highly-talented Dangeau ; he will amuse you with his admirable relations, and I will send with him Madame de St. Simon, who possesses as much wit as her husband. *Adieu ! au revoir !*’

Then, taking the hand of Madame de Maintenon, she departed for the *grands appartements*. The dinner lasted more than an hour ; it was then the fashion to eat much at Court.

Louis XIV took especial care of his own health, but it was his pleasure to exact sacrifices upon this point from others.

In his own carriage he had generally pastry of all kinds for the ladies, and they were always obliged to eat before the king in full dress.

This glorious monarch had his weaknesses ; was not even *Auguste* afraid of thunder.

When the dauphine returned to her own apartment, she found Dangeau, her knight of honour, in a very absent state of mind, and the ladies who were there made heavy complaints of his dulness ; he seemed afraid to open his mouth lest some weighty secret should escape.

Dangeau, generally so gallant, was this day quite the reverse. Madame de Nogaret and Madame St. Simon quizzed him unmercifully, but it was all to little purpose, for the *chevalier d'honneur* remained unmoved.

The dauphine, who was in high spirits with the good news which she had for the Duchess de Fronsac, joined the ladies in tormenting Dangeau.

The marquis, still wearing his serious face, requested the honour of a few minutes' private conversation with the dauphine. She reflected for a moment, then held out her hand, and they passed into a neighbouring saloon. Then the marquis said in a suppressed tone—

‘I implore your royal highness to request the king to give orders for the removal of the Duke de Fronsac to the strong Castle of Pierre-en-cise ; he is much too near in the Bastille.’

Then he continued, in a confidential whisper, ‘He has written delirious letters to Cavoye, and to others, upon his pretended passion.’

‘That might have been a little unlucky for him,’ said the dauphine, with a smile, ‘but see, here is an order to set him at liberty and restore him to his wife,’ and the princess returned to her ladies railing, but in a pleasant manner, at Dangeau.

He quickly saw that he had been guilty of impolicy, and wishing to repair it he now overwhelmed the Duchess de Fronsac with congratulations and compliments.

‘Away, away, my pretty Niobe !’ said the princess to the young duchess ; ‘away ! dry those beauteous eyes, and admit with all the world, or nearly so, that after all I am not such a very wicked creature.’

The Duchess de Fronsac departed in all haste, more happy and more proud than any queen.

Her horses flew like winged messengers. Yet the route from Versailles to Paris seemed never ending, and in Paris the streets interminable, and the Hotel of the Lieutenant of the Police, Argenson, appeared to retreat as she advanced. At last, breathless with impatience, she arrived there.

Argenson read *l'ordre*, and was obligingly prompt ; a few words were hastily written by him and given to the duchess, and a superior officer of police was ordered to attend her to the apartments of the governor of the Bastille.

They arrived there, and found the governor in a state of frightful agitation, and all around him in dismay. When the governor turned and beheld the Duchess de Fronsac, he was mute with surprise.

He mechanically took from her hand the order from the

lieutenant of the police, which she presented to him, read it twice, and appeared utterly confounded.

‘Monsieur,’ cried the duchess, ‘I will thank you to conduct me, without another moment’s delay, to the presence of my dear husband.’

‘Madame,’ replied the governor, in evident confusion, ‘that is quite impossible, for in spite of the most——’

‘For heaven’s sake, sir, quick—explain ! what is it ? You are killing me with terror and suspense.’

‘The truth is, then, for it must out, not half-an-hour ago the Duke de Fronsac effected his escape from the Bastille.’

The governor, after painfully and reluctantly admitting this fact, hurried out of the apartment to hide his vexation and confusion, and gave a loud vent to his rage whilst searching in the courts and corridors.

The thunders of his voice awoke the long sleeping echoes ; the prisoners, at the unusual noise, started in their cells like wild beasts disturbed in their dens. The gaolers, the turnkeys, the watchmen, the guard, armed with muskets, all trembled before the terrible governor, Bernaville, who from time to time drew his sword half out of his scabbard, as if he would gladly stab to the heart the *misérables* who had assisted the young duke in his escape.

But luckily for the man he had escaped at the same moment ; he was one of the gaolers, and had received from Georges a sum of two hundred louis d’or.

The faithful valet had procured for his beloved young master the uniform of an officer on service, and the man who was in the secret let them both pass, and then fled himself.

The governor of the Bastille instantly dispatched an

officer to inform the lieutenant of the police of the duke's escape.

Argenson then revoked the order for setting him at liberty, leaving that for the king to decide upon.

Upon the first hearing of the duke's escape his poor duchess had fainted, and in that senseless state was replaced in her carriage.

C H A P T E R XI.

A FOREST DRAMA.

WINTER had now thrown his mantle of frozen ermine over the groves and lawns of Versailles, the woods were waving with plumes of hoar frost, and flights of rooks and daws were wheeling and screaming, terrifying the deer and royal pheasants, and their hoarse screams were re-echoed from valley to valley, like the plaint of unquiet souls wandering o'er the snowy waste.

In vain some faint, pale rays of the sun attempted to pierce through the lead-coloured sky.

The piercing wind howled through the leafless waste in sad harmony with the scene. At intervals the harsh cry of the eagle might be heard striking terror through the defenceless inmates of the forest. The king of the air was ravenous, and, sailing in mid-air upon his outstretched wing, he prised upon the vast expanse with eye of fire, seeking for a victim to satiate his hungry maw.

Heedless of the cold, disdainful of the piercing frosty air, a man enveloped in a great Castilian mantle seemed determined not to quit a little belt of wood, situated about two leagues south-west of the Château of Versailles.

Some woodcutters passed, but they hastened their steps to quit the place where this muffled stranger tramped about with impatient step.

One only, tempted by curiosity, or less cowardly than the rest, sat down upon a fallen tree about two hundred

paces distant from the little wood, and probably thinking that he would not be remarked ; but he was deceived, for almost at the moment he was hailed by the unknown.

At first he was tempted to fly, but it suddenly came into his head that it might be the devil, who on this day had taken a fancy to wear a mantle, and amuse himself in the wood.

So he concluded that it would be of no use to attempt to make his escape, and he began with cautious step to approach the stranger, who continued his regular promenade from one tree to another like a sentinel who is afraid of being frozen upon his post.

‘ Friend,’ said the stranger to the woodcutter, ‘ don’t you think you could light me a fire ? I must wait here until the hunters pass by—do you think they are far off ? One cannot yet hear the sound of the horn.’

‘ He wishes to tempt me nearer to him,’ muttered the woodman to himself.

‘ Dost thou not understand, blockhead ? I asked thee to light me a fire. My hands are not so benumbed but I can pay thee in advance—here !’

The stranger placed a crown in the woodman’s hands, who then instantly recognised in him a true gentleman, and busied himself in collecting dry branches, withered leaves, and bushes, and set fire to some soft moss by some sparks from his flint. The view of the smoke, succeeded by a sparkling flame, rejoiced the almost petrified stranger, who warmed, rubbed, and chafed his hands.

Shortly there was a red glow of fire, and the stranger was revived by the delightful heat.

The woodman surveyed him with curious, inquiring eye, and at last ventured to say—

‘Mayhap you have lost the hunt, or your way in the forest, sir?’

‘Lost, h’m ! why, yes, that is, partly. I know that they will pass this way—at least some of them.’

‘Ay, it’s easy to see, sir, by your looks, that you belong to the king,’ replied the woodman. ‘Perhaps you are a great lord of the Court?’

‘No, no, my good fellow, I can’t boast of that.’

‘Why—are you in the service of the *vénérerie*?’

‘No, my friend, you are wrong again.’

‘Then you belong to the stables?’

‘Once more in error ; guess again.’

‘Why, who the devil are you then? Do you belong to the wardrobe, the pantry, the cellar, or do you belong to the military? Or perhaps you are one of the gentlemen of the chapel?’

‘Why, what dost thou know of the Court?’ said the stranger.

‘Know? I think I ought to know *summut*, when my son is a *piqueur* in the stables of her highness the duchess !’

‘Of the dauphine?’ inquired the stranger.

‘Ay, now you have it ; he passes his life with those superb horses, and—’

‘Now listen to me,’ said the stranger ; ‘where is this son of thine now?’

‘I’d bet you a louis—that is, if I had it—that you’d never guess. So I may as well tell you. He rides before the princess herself, who follows the *chace* herself to-day. But what an old fool I am, to tell you this, who know it better than I do.’

‘Well, well—now mind what I am about to say to thee. I know that the hunt will pass this place, and therefore thy

son must pass also. Now thou must pretend to be wounded, or sick. He will dismount from his horse to assist thee. Some one must instantly fill his place. I shall be here, and will mount his horse, and fulfil his duty. I am ready to swear to thee that I am a most admirable *piqueur*. Art thou content to do my bidding? See! here are three golden louis for thee, in advance, and I promise to make them into twenty.'

'Why, you ought to be nearly as great a lord as the king himself, to take such maggots into your head, and pay for them so dearly. How can I accept your gold, and yet how can I refuse it? It is a difficult case, I must pretend to be dying—the Lord be good unto me—suppose I should be found out, why I should be half-murdered for enticing a *piqueur* from his duty.'

'No, thy son would prevent it, he would defend thee.'

'He! No, he would be the first to lend a helping hand, and would swear I was drunk. To be sure I do love a drop of good wine—yes, I confess that—but then, for drunkenness—no, hang it, I despise that.'

'Ay, that is very right,' said the stranger, 'but at all events pocket the three louis; we can account for them afterwards.'

'And if I am not killed, or wounded, shall I return them to you?'

'No, but rather think of receiving the other seventeen.'

'Your argument is very tempting, but what would you have me to do? Must I cry out, and roar as if I was possessed by a demon?'

'No, no, no, only lie down, and pretend to be drunk, and leave all the rest to me.'

'My son will only half throttle me, and pass on. Yo

do not know this chap as well as I do ; when I have drank a drop or two too many, he has no more respect for me than if I were a horse.'

'Never mind, we'll bring him to his senses.'

'Now, don't you go for to offer him either gold or silver.'

'Why, what the devil !—is he so very proud ?'

'Perhaps more proud than you are, though I don't know your name ?'

'True, but now, whilst I think of it, pray what is your son's name ?'

'Name, sir ? Why he's called Henry,' replied the woodman ; 'that's his name, and every one calls him by it.'

'Good,' replied the stranger ; 'now mind thou art drunk, and I will do all the rest.'

'Ay, we may laugh now, but take care we have not cause to weep before the play is out ; but, to be sure, twenty louis !'

Horns were now heard, which doubtless proceeded from the hunters ; they were approaching then, and the wild harmony thrilled through the stranger, who was no other than the young Duke de Fronsac.

The noises continued slowly to approach. The prickers were upon the traces of the stag, but snow began to fall and the scent was scarcely perceptible to the nose of the best hounds. Horns continued to sound to collect the hunters who were dispersed in the woods. Our attentive listeners now heard the galloping of an approaching horse.

'Down ! down to the ground, and remember you are in agony,' said the duke to the woodcutter.

At this moment a horseman passed with the swiftness of an arrow ; another followed him ; a third appeared, sounded the *rappel*, and galloped off.

The woodman lay ready to act his part, but he had not yet recognised Henry. But suddenly Fronsac beheld the woodcutter fling himself at full length upon the earth, and made the wood ring with his frightful cries. A *piqueur* rode up and reined in his foaming steed near to where the woodman lay.

‘Henry!’ cried a voice, ‘Henry, it is your father! a tree has fallen upon him and crushed him.’

‘Holy Mary!’ cried the *piqueur*, ‘what is he doing in the woods now, when he ought to have been snug in his own cottage?’ And alighting, he gave his horse to Fronsac to hold for him, for, being in a hunting dress, he probably took him for one of the suite, with whom, however, he was not acquainted; then he stooped down to speak to his father, and at that moment Fronsac sprang into the saddle and departed at full gallop, to the great surprise of Henry.

A mounted female now approached within a short distance, and passed rapidly forwards. Henry dared not show himself. He had placed his father in a deep hollow, and he crouched lowly himself until the dauphine was fairly passed. The princess was escorted by the Marquises Dangeau and Gamache.

The young duke who now personated the *piqueur*, always keeping considerably in advance, was not recognised for a stranger. He was acquainted with every turn of the forest, besides, the French horns continuing to sound, served him for a guide.

The princess continued to follow the false *piqueur*, sometimes leaving her attendant squires at some distance, for she was mounted on a fleet and vigorous steed.

The snow now began to fall in great flakes, and shortly became so thick, that it was scarcely possible to see.

The *piqueur* moderated his speed ; the princess was now not more than ten bounds of her steed from him. She called out to him and ordered him not to quit her, and heaven knew he was ready enough to obey her.

They continued to push forward ; their horses were spirited and ardent, and pricked their pointed ears to the lively tones of the mellow horns.

The Marquis de Gamache, blinded, probably, by the falling snow, made a wrong turn and soon became quite bewildered in the mazes of the forest ; Dangeau missing his friend halted, and made the woods echo with his sonorous voice, hoping to recall him. In the meantime the princess continued to follow her trusty guide the *piqueur*. But the storm now became frightful ; the heavy snow-storm deepened the gloom of the forest, and it therefore became utterly impossible to discern objects at six paces' distance.

The *piqueur* slackened his pace and allowed the princess to approach, for he thought that her courage must soon fail her ; and, in truth, she was in such fear of ravines and hidden pits that she could now scarcely guide her panting steed. The *piqueur* now deemed it his duty to ride by her side, and from time to time he laid his hand upon her horse's rein. He had hitherto only replied by respectful monosyllables. Now the darkness became so thick that it was necessary to halt.

The princess complained of the bitter cold, and appeared to be dreadfully alarmed. Fronsac in reply said, in a disguised voice, that he knew there was a farm at a little distance. As he had pulled his hat over his face, and was covered with snow from head to foot, it would not have been easy to have recognised in him the young duke, and

besides, in this gloomy forest it was too dark now to distinguish features.

‘It is impossible for me to go much farther,’ said the princess. ‘Holy Father! we shall be lost.’

‘Madame,’ said the *piqueur*, ‘allow me to take your horse’s bridle, and I will safely conduct you to a place of refuge.’

And alighting, he abandoned his own horse, and took hold of the dauphine’s, and plunging through the now deep drifts of snow, he pursued his way with difficulty.

The princess, in her fright, had not recognised the voice of the Duke de Fronsac, while offering a silent prayer for deliverance, and deplored the fate of the people of her suite, who were also wandering in the entangled mazes of the forest.

She was now suffering horribly from fear and cold. Fronsac turned round, and in dismay beheld her in a state of fainting; he instantly stopped the docile horse, and as the princess fell he caught and sustained her in his arms. He was certain that they were now very near to a farm, and charged with his precious burden he advanced slowly but courageously; never had he felt himself so strong. His foot was sure, and his keen, searching eye pierced through the gloom. He proceeded through the knee-deep snow, followed by the two horses, whose instinct on such occasions make them cling to man for shelter and support.

The dauphine appeared to be insensible to all that was passing around, and Fronsac carried her with the tender care of a mother. Her head was reclined upon the shoulder of her sturdy young guide, and her beauteous tresses were floating in the night wind, and Fronsac often felt them fanning his cheek.

As yet he had not pronounced one word ; at intervals he heard the princess breathe a faint sigh, and then could not refrain from more tenderly pressing to his heart the dear, suffering princess.

After a painful march of ten minutes, he at last arrived at the farmhouse. The dogs barked, and the woodmen, hearing the alarm, opened the door. Fronsac tottered in with his lovely charge. A blazing wood fire cheered the apartment. The woodman's daughters, compassion glistening in their eyes, attended upon the unknown lady with tender solicitude, paying her a thousand kind attentions.

By degrees the grateful warmth of the room reanimated her, but she did not yet pay any attention to surrounding objects.

The farmer's wife held her upon her knees, and the young girls chafed her hands and feet, astonished at their delicate smallness and beauty. It was a charming and affecting picture.

The princess, slowly recovering her senses, began to look about her with apparent astonishment : all the visages by which she was surrounded were strange to her, and caused her to feel a species of terror. Fronsac avoided her looks, besides he was suffering from the excessive fatigue. In half-an-hour he was fully restored, but the princess still remained almost inanimate.

Fronsac betrayed such dreadful anxiety on her account, that the kind-hearted people of the farm-house thought he must be the husband of the lady, and they pitied his despair. The young duke had already dispatched one of the woodmen to Versailles, with a few hasty lines addressed to Mademoiselle de Ludre, at the palace, promising a handsome sum if the note was delivered in a couple of hours.

After the messenger had departed, the farmer approached the duke and, with a lowly reverence, said—

‘You belong to the Court, my lord.’

‘Do not speak in so loud a tone,’ replied the duke, in a whisper.

‘Oh ! I understand,’ replied the farmer, mysteriously, ‘you wish to disguise yourself, but it is easy to see that you are a great lord.’

‘No, no ; thou art mistaken. I am only a poor esquire to Madame la Dauphine.’

The farmer, with an incredulous smile, said—

‘I know few husbands as anxious as you are, and I am sure you love each other dearly.’

Fronsac was now greatly agitated ; he fixed his penetrating eye upon the man, who, fearful of having given offence, muttered some faint excuses.

‘Ah ! my good friend,’ said Fronsac, drawing him a little further from the immense fire-place, ‘do not attempt to destroy the delusion, nor disturb my dreamy thoughts. Oh ! repeat again and again that we are formed for, that we ought to adore each other ! and oh ! that thou couldst say never more shall ye be separated ! Do not be afraid, but speak out, and tell me all that passes in thy heart of hearts upon this subject.’

The farmer stared at the greatly excited young duke in utter astonishment, and not being able to guess at its cause, he did not know whether he should condole with or congratulate him ; but greatly emboldened he seized the duke’s hand, and said—

‘I pray you, my young sir and master, to answer me just one question, and it will relieve me from considerable embarrassment—do you feel happy or not ?’

‘Well, then, to be candid, at this moment I am far from feeling at ease.’

‘You are in great pain. I thought so, but I can speedily set you to rights. I can give you a dram of excellent Geneva, and if that won’t cure you, why——’

Fronsac thanked the honest woodman, and, smiling through his tears at his prescription, assured him that all the doctors and medicaments in the world would be of no avail in his case.

The woodman stared with wonder, and shook his head in token of his pity for the desperate case of this young and handsome cavalier, and made some awkward attempts at consoling him.

‘My good friend,’ said Fronsac, ‘if you knew me more intimately, perhaps thou wouldest only laugh at me instead of pitying me; for at the same time I assure thee that my malady is mortal, I swear to thee that I do not feel a wish to be cured of it.’

The woodman again opened his great eyes, and with a sagacious nod settled the matter in his own mind——

‘This young man must certainly be deranged,’ he muttered to himself.

The unknown lady, now come to herself, was questioning the young girls who surrounded her, and thanking their kind, hospitable mother.

They had placed her upon a sort of couch, and raised her head upon pillows; her feet reposed horizontally upon a rush-bottomed chair before the fire. She had already made inquiries for the man who had saved her.

‘Let him come near the fire,’ said she, with a little impatience; ‘the poor young man may perish from the cold and fatigue.’

‘The lady speaks coolly enough, at all events, of her husband,’ thought the woodman.

Some of the young girls instantly flew in search of Fronsac, and they found him in an adjoining room warming himself at the stove. They informed him that madame had been inquiring for him, and that he must instantly go to her.

The young duke obeyed the command, but first he just whispered a few words into the ear of the eldest of the girls, who, with a scared look, instantly flew off to seek her mother, and communicated to her the mysterious words of the stranger.

Then the mother quitted the lady, and with her other daughters retired to the room where Fronsac was, who instantly quitted it, and presented himself, with his hat in his hand, before the dauphine of France. He was now alone, *tête-à-tête*, with her.

The young duke saluted her with profound respect, and remained standing at about six paces. Then she instantly knew him, and would have uttered a great cry but her voice failed her.

‘Madame,’ said Fronsac, in a suppressed voice, ‘if ever prisoner was happy in breaking his bonds—if ever a man applauded himself for having risked his life, in regaining his liberty, it is certainly he who has the honour of now appearing before you. It is now more than seven months since I escaped from the Bastille, and have wandered in disguise to shun the agents of Argenson seven months ! During which time I have sought every opportunity of seeing you from afar, clandestinely. My good star this day conducted me into the wood through which you were to pass. A thousand blessings upon it ! and now, welcome the terrors of the dungeon, I will submit to them without

one murmur. Oh, let me bow once more to the earth before you, and swear to you an eternal devotion !'

'Ah, my lord duke, I beg of you to rise ; first let me thank you for having saved my life, and then I must seriously scold you. You will ruin yourself, my Lord Fronsac ; the king is furious against you. You are in a state of actual rebellion, and the police are in search of you. I had managed to obtain your pardon, and at the very moment unluckily you took it into your head to break your prison. Oh, had you only remained one hour longer you might have freely departed, reconciled to your king, and to your family !'

'Madame,' replied Fronsac, 'I am a rebel, a hardy one, and I glory in my rebellion. I would have refused the terms of their proffered pardon. The conditions of their grace will never prove acceptable to me.'

'What is this that you are saying, monsieur ? Why, it is rank folly, madness ! I pray you, sir, to form ideas more necessary to your future happiness. I am really truly concerned, sir, but—you understand me ?'

'Oh, madame ! do not cruelly regret having restored life to a poor prisoner, who was dying with grief. The mysterious box which was brought to me by Doctor Fagon was like the divine manna in the desert ; besides, its contents were calculated to inebriate me. It was great, it was noble in you to restore it to me. Alas ! madame, have I since been so unfortunate as to merit a loss of your esteem ? What can I have done ? Disloyal towards you ? that I have never been, never shall be.'

'That I feel assured of,' said the sweetest and most amiable of women, 'but I cannot the less condemn and deplore this dangerous conduct of yours.'

‘Dangerous to myself alone, madame ; in that cause, welcome prison. As for other misfortunes, I must bear them as best I can.’

‘My lord duke, you appear to have suffered severely.’

‘Yes, madame ; much more than my looks betray.’

‘Every one at Versailles pities and sincerely regrets you, and as for myself, what shall I say ? My position was a cruel one. Often have I solicited your pardon, and often have my motives been unfairly, nay foully, interpreted. And yet it must have been plainly seen that I did all in my power to render myself agreeable to Madame de Fronsac, whose friend I am greatly inclined to be—that let me assure you.’

The Duke de Fronsac stood leaning near to the chimney with his hand shading his forehead, contemplating by stealth the adored of his heart.

When the princess ceased to speak Fronsac continued silent ; then with downcast eyes she inquired if he had sent for a carriage to Versailles ?

When the duke told her that he had dictated a letter to Madame de Ludre, and had sent it to her by one of the forester’s sons, the duchess raised her beautiful eyes, upon which beamed a charming expression of gratitude, for the delicacy of his manner upon this occasion.

‘You have saved me from the bitter cold, from the drifting snow ; nay, perhaps, from death, my lord, and I can never cease to remember it ; and I must ever also bear in mind the care you have taken, and the foresight you have evinced, to preserve me from evil, and from evil speakers.’ And as a token of her esteem and gratitude, the princess extended towards him her royal hand.

Fronsac was now too violently agitated to think of

prudence ; he cast himself upon his knees before the idol of his adoration, and gazed upon her with eyes swimming with admiration and love.

His head was now bent over the arm of the old fauteuil—wild, passionate, extravagant, murmurings escaped from his quivering lips ; he was in the very delirium of passion. His soul, like a sweet-toned harp, vibrated with melody.

The real world and its concerns had disappeared, and was forgotten.

‘Madame,’ cried the devoted young man, ‘the feelings of my soul must out, or they will consume me—a heart burning like mine, what does it fear for exile, a dungeon, or death ? Are not ten minutes passed thus in your presence worth forty years of grandeur, pomp, glory ? O, you who are all goodness will pardon me for daring to say that I love you. Yes, I swear that I love you to distraction—you, you, madame, have filled my soul with joy and sorrow ; you are by turns my torment and my delight. I exist by you, and for you—all my thoughts are like feebler stars lost in your brighter rays. I have passed entire months in my gloomy cell, recalling to my fond memory your dear image. Sometimes panting with fever, I writhed in torture at the remembrance of the past. Sometimes like one escaped from a suffocating fire I respired long, refreshing breezes perfumed by hope. Oh, madame, I may be foolish ; this poor, fond heart may break—rather let me die a thousand deaths than cause you a moment’s pain—live, live, calm, happily enshrined with rays of glory. As for me, I must wrestle violently, breast to breast, with my fate. Yes, yes ; I must vanquish and overcome anger, jealousy, vanity—but my love, alas ! never—it is my treasure, my life, my glory, my heaven.’

‘ You weep, madame,’ said he pausing, and then added in a frenzied tone, ‘ Ha! may all the sorrows and sufferings of Job fall upon my devoted head, if I would willingly cause one drop of sorrow to fall from those angel eyes.’

And thus saying he pressed in his hands, and to his beating heart the snow-white hand, which the princess had presented to him.

At such a moment welcome death, when the soul is filled with extatic bliss, but Fronsac was suddenly awoke from this elysium dream by noise, and a confusion of voices.

Fronsac trembled with rage and vexation, and the noble lady at whose feet he was pouring out the rhapsodies of his heart shook with fear of some unknown evil.

A carriage had arrived ; and the courtly attendants were already thundering at the door.

‘ Away, away !’ cried the much-adored princess. ‘ Save yourself—if they find you here, you will be—fly, fly !’

‘ Never,’ exclaimed Fronsac. ‘ Heavens ! separate from you ?’

‘ You will destroy yourself, I tell you.’

‘ And of what consequence is that ?’

‘ You will ruin me also, my young friend.’

‘ Ah !’ cried the almost delirious young duke. ‘ Angel of my life, injure thee ! Command, bid me fly, and your abject slave obeys.’

Then seizing his hat, and his *couteau de chasse*, he opened a window at the back of the house, snatched a kiss from the trembling hand of his beloved princess, darted through the window, sped across the garden, and plunged through the snow into the deepest recesses of the forest, with the swiftness of the stag.

Madame de Ludre had arrived. She was delighted to see her dear dauphine in apparent safety, but she was also miserable when she beheld her pale looks, and agitated features ; and throwing her arms around her neck, she addressed her by all the endearing names which her tenderness and her age entitled her to make use of.

Madame de Ludre was followed by Doctor Fagon, who entered with his usual air of dignified gravity ; next came Manon, with vestments, pelisses, mantles, robes, and linen.

The wondering inmates of the cottage could never sufficiently admire all these grand personages. They stood motionless and silent, alternately looking at this grand lady and her courtly attendants.

Doctor Fagon found the pulse of the dauphine feverish, and he silently marked the wildness of her restless eye, but he saw no reason to prevent her instant departure.

They sought on all sides for the preserver of the princess. It was now known that it was Henry, the *piqueur*, who had ridden thus before her in the forest. Henry, however, had disappeared.

Some of the woodcutters people affirmed that they had seen him flying over the low walls like a hunted deer.

It was now generally admitted that this same Henry was the best, the most generous, the most modest of all *piqueurs*, flying thus disinterestedly from praise and recompence. But his fortune was made from that day.

Now tardily arrived Dangeau and the Marquis de Gamache, half dead with cold and their fears for the safety of the princess.

The dauphine reassured them by her enchanting smile, but her secret she kept carefully enshrined within her own breast.

The snow had ceased to fall, the carriages were filled, and they departed.

At Versailles the happy return of the princess was hailed with delight ; the king was shortly announced, and he was more than usually tender and affectionate towards her.

The dauphin and the Duke de Berry arrived somewhat later ; never had chase been more disastrous. Each had some catastrophe to relate, some wound or scratch to display ; all were full of complaints.

Henry was praised and feasted by many of the courtier grandes, he had scarcely power to contain himself ; if he did completely comprehend the cause of all this good fortune he had wit enough to keep his mouth shut, and not make a marvel of it to others. He had hitherto only been a *sub-piqueur*, but the very next day he was promoted to the rank of *premiere piqueur*, and also received a considerable sum in shining gold.

CHAPTER XII.

DEATH OF THE DAUPHINE.

IT was one of the first *soirées* of February. The king had played excellently well, and had been fortunate ; and Louis, contrary to his usual custom, had prolonged the sitting until after midnight.

Before quitting the saloon, the king took the dauphin apart, and it was remarked that he spoke to him in a very mysterious but very animated manner.

The dauphin was then seen to take a letter out of his pocket, which he gave to the king, who then called the Duke du Maine, who came limping up as usual, and showed it to him.

The duke exhibited great surprise upon reading the letter ; then he spoke to the dauphin with a mournful air, but this prince did not appear to attach much importance to the paper. Besides, monseigneur was not in the habit of entering into direct conversation with the Duke du Maine, whom he but lightly esteemed, to the great regret of Louis XIV.

The heir to the throne of France, too long neglected, seemed determined to show his superiority over a *legitimated* son, who had hitherto been the spoiled child of the old king.

The Duke du Maine appeared to be inclined to enlarge upon the subject of the mysterious paper given to him by the king, but the dauphin answered rather rudely—

‘ Bah ! is it necessary to believe in sorcerers ? are not our lives in the hands of God ? ’

The king became very serious, and was more than half inclined to quit the saloon. The hour *de coucher* was fully come, and upon this point he was generally exact as well as upon the ceremonies which attended it.

The Duke du Maine ventured to remark to his majesty that he was delighted and astonished that he should forget the hour.

The king, without replying to these remarks, went directly to the table, where his dear dauphine was playing, and appeared to be greatly interested in her cards, and perceiving this, she requested his advice.

The king remained silent. Sometimes his regards were fixed upon the cards, at others upon the visage of the Duke de Luxembourg, or Rochefoucauld, who were playing at the dauphine’s table, then again he would fix his eye for a moment upon the Duchess de Levi. His eagle looks were enough to discomfit any one.

The Count de Toulouse in a guarded whisper made the dauphine remark the embarrassment, which the king’s absence of mind had thrown upon the entire company assembled in the saloon.

‘ Sire,’ said the princess, hoping to rouse her royal grandfather, ‘ I hope my play interests you ? ’

‘ Very much, my daughter.’

‘ I am really very unfortunate ! what dreadful cards I hold ; there is a fatality in all these things,’ she half seriously remarked.

The king seemed to shudder, and instantly retired.

A few moments afterwards the game ended.

The dauphine had lost considerably, and often when the

commencement of a game had been completely in her favour.

The king retired to his bed-chamber, where he yet for some time continued to converse privately with the dauphin, who still did not seem inclined to view with a serious eye the letter which he had received that day. It contained some matter of moment appertaining to himself.

At last the king suffered himself to be overruled by the apparent carelessness of his grandson, and he passed into a neighbouring apartment, where he was accustomed before he retired to rest to throw some biscuits to his favourite greyhounds. There was one of them in an unusual fit of anger, which growled, and seemed as though he would bite his royal master.

The king returned into his bed-chamber in a bad humour, and rather rudely clapped the door behind him.

Then he bade adieu to those of his family ; and then majestically waved away all save his personal attendants.

The dauphin retired to his own suite of apartments, and the dauphine also took possession of hers. She was in a gay humour, and laughed much at the fright she had given to M. de Luxembourg by her mad, harum-scarum play.

The Ladies Nogaret and St. Simon were with her ; of all her ladies they were the youngest, and the princess loved to have them near to her, to chat and criticise upon any event of the day.

The princess entered alone into one of the boudoirs belonging to her chamber, and there she found a golden snuff box upon her toilette table.

She opened it. The box contained Spanish snuff, most delightfully perfumed.

She experienced great pleasure in sometimes respiration

this sweet powder in secret, for the king could not bear powerful odours of any kind, particularly the smell of tobacco, and he would have severely scolded his beloved granddaughter if he had only suspected her of forming such a strange fancy.

The princess replaced the box upon the toilette-table, not thinking the finding of it there a matter of any importance. And she even forgot to inquire of her ladies if they knew who had placed it in her boudoir.

Madame de St. Simon was very intellectual and witty, and she related her little stories in a pungent, racy manner, which set the dauphine and Madame de Nogaret into roars of laughter; and in the meantime Manon and the other ladies were occupied in the toilette of the night. Forty wax lights illumined this apartment. The charming princess was seated before her immense mirror, in which she might admire herself at full length, whilst committing her head and her feet to the care of her *femmes-de-chambre*. They proceeded to divest her of her pearls, her bracelets, and her court robes. They then slipped her fairy feet into silken embroidered slippers, and hid her elegant form in the loose folds of an elegant *peignoir* of *basin des Indes*, trimmed with English lace. Her classic head was uncovered, and her beauteous chestnut hair was rolled behind *en chignon*.

The princess reluctantly submitted to the etiquette of the toilette, and seldom gave more than a quarter of an hour to this (with many ladies) duty of duties.

If this princess was detained more than the allotted quarter of an hour at her toilette, she betrayed her impatience by the rose-like tint blooming upon her lily cheeks.

The ladies in attendance retired. Madame de St. Simon continued to chat, when suddenly Madame de Nogaret saw

the dauphine sink swooning upon the fauteuil ; she flew to support her ! A strong essence reanimated her, but she could in no way account for this sudden attack, after feeling all the previous evening in such good health and spirits.

The ladies advised her to get into bed, but she, on the contrary, thought she might be the better for air and movement, and she began to pace about the apartment, leaning for support upon the arm of Madame de St. Simon.

At the expiration of half-an-hour, fancying herself better, she thanked her ladies, and obliged them to quit her, saying that she wished to pray alone, at the foot of her bed. Then Madame de Nogaret took a velvet cushion and placed it upon the carpet.

The dauphine thanked her with her eyes, as she retired, and then she, with unwonted caprice, recalled these two ladies, who were already in a neighbouring saloon, saying that she felt a strong wish to embrace them. They would have kissed her hands, but she opened her arms, and one after the other, pressed them frequently to her heart. They supposed her to be oppressed by some secret care or sorrow.

When the ladies again left the princess, she fastened the little bolt of the door which led to the saloon, and kneeling upon the cushion which was placed at the foot of her bed, with clasped hands, she raised her soul towards her heavenly Father with unwonted fervour. It seemed as if this night her parched soul longed to be refreshed at the celestial spring. Her streaming eyes were suffused with tears, and her heart beat with violence.

She remained so long in this attitude that one of her women thought it her duty to quit her little cabinet, and beseech the princess to retire to her bed, and seek repose.

The dauphine at first did not seem to hear her ; then the somewhat alarmed *femme-de-chambre* ventured to renew her prayer in a louder tone of voice. Then the princess first appeared to be sensible of her presence, and starting, gave a cry of alarm.

‘It is only me, your highness,’ said the *femme-de-chambre*.

‘Ah !’ sighed the dauphine, ‘how could I be so silly as not instantly to recognize thee ?’

Then she suffered herself to be assisted into bed. The apartment was now feebly illuminated by the dull, sepulchral light of an ancient porcelain lamp. And now the spirit of silence alone, with slow steps, promenaded this mysterious chamber.

On the morning of the following day, those who traversed the courts of the *château* might have remarked a singular agitation amongst the household of the king and the princes.

Many carriages arrived at full speed ; people alighted and entered with precipitation into the vestibules, to be introduced. In the ante-rooms of the dauphin all was tumult. The *menins* scarcely paid any attention to the questions which were put to them ; they passed and repassed without ceasing, bearing orders, going to the king’s apartments, returning to those of monseigneur, or flying to those of Madame the Dauphine.

Above all the Marquis de Gamache was in an agitation which bore a close resemblance to rage ; he was rough and rude to many of the guards, and had a serious quarrel with an officer of dragoons.

In one of his mad freaks he almost threw down Madame de Levi, as she was rising from her seat, with the purpose of going up to the apartments of the dauphine.

‘Monsieur de Gamache,’ said Madame de Levi, ‘you are really quite beside yourself! but is it true that Madame—’

‘Ha, duchess! ’ replied Gamache, ‘away! away! up with you; alas! alas! the dauphine is in her agony.’

These alarming words were heard by a number of persons, and they flew from mouth to mouth; every heart was chilled, terror blanched every face.

Soon, as in a terrible storm, each ran blindly hither and thither. The king had not yet awoke; the captain of the guard was in great perplexity, and paced with great strides the ante-chamber *royale*, waiting for the sound of his bell with restless anxiety. Dangeau now came to him in breathless haste, stammering out—

‘Duke, the king—must—be instantly awoke.’

‘Quite impossible, my lord,’ replied the captain of the guard, ‘I expect to hear the king’s bell every moment.’

‘The king will be sorely displeased at not having been informed, monsieur.

‘Well, well, if the king is displeased I cannot help it, sir. I know my duty.’

Two of the *menins* from the dauphin now arrived.

‘My lord duke, we must be instantly admitted to the king.’

‘You may think so, Cheverny,’ said the inflexible captain of the body-guard.

‘Yes, I do think so,’ said the nettled messenger; ‘it is the dauphin’s commands, my lord duke.’

‘Should the dauphin himself deign to come in person, and insist upon entering, it would be no easy matter.’

At that very moment the breathless dauphin did arrive. The captain of the guard would undoubtedly have barred the way if he had not just then heard the first tinkle of the

king's bell. The door flew open, and the captain of the guard was the first to enter; the king's first *valet-de-chambre* was already there, having entered by a small interior door, and was already busily engaged in dressing the king. His majesty shortly joined the dauphin in the chamber of Madame la Dauphine; there a sad scene of desolation met the aged monarch's view.

Extended upon her bed, the brain on fire, the limbs twitching with convulsions, the poor princess lay in a burning fever. Her eyes were glazed, her respiration painful, her pulse in frightful disorder.

Doctors Fagon and Boudin, her physicians in ordinary, were there. Doctor Maréchal was now announced; he had been sought for through all Paris. The poor king anxiously questioned them all as to the sudden malady of the princess. The doctors were very cautious in their replies, and kept their eyes and attention fixed upon the royal sufferer, as yet quite unable to declare the cause of these frightful and sudden pains.

The dauphin, pale as a ghost, never quitted the couch of his wife. The Ladies Ludre and Levi were dreadfully agitated, and refused admission to the other ladies of the palace. Doctor Fagon retired a few paces from the dying princess, and the king instantly followed him, but the thoughtful doctor was impenetrable, although the king pressed him hard with questions.

Doctor Maréchal now approached, and spoke of the measles. Fagon, in reply, simply shook his head, and shrugged his shoulders. Doctor Boudin seemed to incline to the opinion of Doctor Maréchal.

The fever continued to increase in violence; the poor dauphine, oppressed and overcome by the presence of so

many persons, requested to be left in solitude, and when this wish was known it was instantly complied with. All the spectators left the room, excepting the dauphin, one physician, and two ladies in waiting.

The king, with discomposed looks, and a prey to inward anxiety, went to hold a council.

The fatal news had already reached the good city of Paris; public prayers were offered up, and crowds of devout suppliants thronged the altars of the various churches. Never was princess more fondly beloved. Many noble families departed in all haste from Paris for Versailles.

Towards evening long lines of carriages were seen approaching, as if a grand ball was to be given ; files of city coaches and more humble conveyances, as if it were the eve of a grand review, or public rejoicing—the approaches to the castle were as if in a state of siege. Valets eternally passed to and fro, carrying bulletins, which they held up to the gaze of the crowd.

Many persons had penetrated into the inner courts who did not belong to any service of the royal palace, and on this day they were freely allowed to wander about.

Amongst others a young man, muffled in a large mantle, had made himself conspicuous by his wild gestures and sudden starts. In many his appearance and haggard eye excited suspicion, and some one noticed this strange figure to one of the body guards, who instantly flew to report it to the sergeant of his company. The sergeant determined to follow this stranger, and keep an eye upon him.

The unknown did not appear to notice that his steps were followed, for he continued to pace about with hurried steps, and stop and interrogate every one who appeared to be coming from the apartment of the dauphine. At last he

pushed on to the marble court ; its gate was left open for a few moments, and, spying his opportunity, he glided in, passing the two sentinels, and gaining the lower hall which led to a staircase. The sergeant, who continued to follow, judged that the unknown must be well acquainted with the palace, but his suspicions were not lulled, and he was only more determined to follow him. Suddenly the *chace* glided into a gallery which led to the laboratory of Boulduc, apothecary to the king, and where the doctors were about to consult ; it was then the sergeant pounced upon him, and seized him by the collar to arrest him.

Then the stranger, turning upon him his commanding eye, said, ‘I must then confide in your honour, sir ; I am the Duke de Fronsac !’

The sergeant of the guards slackened his hold, he was under some obligations to Richelieu. He begged the duke to be careful of thus exposing himself, reminding him that he was still under the ban of the *lettre de cachet*, and concluded by making a tender of his service.

‘Sir,’ replied the young duke, ‘you have it in your power to do me a great and signal favour—it is to procure me a safe retreat in any part of the palace, and constant reports as to the state of Madame la Dauphine.’

‘And that will be no easy matter, my lord duke. Almost every one you meet would recognise you ; but stay, let me think a moment. Will you consent to put up with the accommodation of the guard-room ? if so, I will pass the word through the medium of my comrades.’

‘Consent ! to be sure I will ; my dear fellow, you are my saviour !’ cried Fronsac.

‘Then, my lord duke, be silent and follow me.’

Fronsac followed his new friend with light, elastic step,

into a solitary and obscure hall, at some distance from the royal apartments, where the men retired to take a sleep after being relieved from mounting guard.

The sergeant whispered into the ear of two or three of his friends ; they opened a small cabinet which adjoined this room, and placing a spare mattrass, with a chair, and table, the disconsolate, anxious young duke took possession of it, requesting again, and again, that the good sergeant would send him frequent reports of the dauphine's state. The sergeant again promised to do everything in his power to gain information.

During the night Fronsac received several reports. The duke, extended upon the floor, upon his mattrass, lay melancholy and anxious, listening to the various noises which in the stillness of the night ran through the galleries and arcades of this vast palace, anxiously thrilling with alarm as each new messenger arrived. And it was not until the next day that the sergeant could prevail upon the wretched young duke to take any kind of refreshment.

For two days the dauphine had patiently endured much suffering. The golden snuff-box, with its highly perfumed snuff coming to her mind, she mentioned the circumstance to her ladies, and her surprise at finding it in her boudoir ; one of them flew to look for it, and bring it to the princess, but it was no longer there.

Doctor Fagon was right, the disease of the princess was certainly not the measles. The malady as yet proceeded from an unknown cause, but the king's physician and Boudin began to suspect it. Maréchal continued obstinately of his first opinion. A consultation of seven doctors was now determined upon, and they speedily arrived from Paris. The king commanded Boulduc, who was a clever

and scientific chemist, to attend this consultation ; it was held by taper light, in a saloon which preceded the apartment of the dauphine, and was separated from it by the great gallery. The king assisted in person ; Madame de Maintenon was also there ; undoubtedly this was a very solemn meeting. The doors of the saloon were guarded both within and without, as if a reunion of kings were debating upon the fate of Europe.

Louis XIV. requested that the doctors would speak their opinions freely, not attending to any forms of language which etiquette, or ceremony, might prescribe because that the king was present. His majesty then took his place on a sofa, near to Madame de Maintenon, in one corner of the apartment. The doctors occupied the centre, and were seated round a great table of green marble.

They addressed each other without rising ; Boudin was in the chair. The discussion was animated, and even became very warm. Maréchal and Fagon supported their opinions in forcible and scientific language. The king patiently listened to all ; he followed every thread of the argument, hoping to hit upon the true cause of the malady.

After much argument and contrariety of opinion, Doctor Fagon suddenly arose, and striking the marble table with his fist energetically, swore by his soul and conscience that it was his opinion that the violent malady which was destroying the dauphine was caused by having imbibed a subtle, corrosive, and impetuous poison : and he added that her malady exhibited the same symptoms as that which had proved fatal to the grand dauphin.

The doctor reseated himself, and there was a dead silence.

The king was pale, and avoided the looks of Madame de Maintenon.

A mortal sadness was painted upon every countenance. Each feared to break this gloomy stillness.

But at last Maréchal arose, and protested in indignant language against the opinion of his scientific brother.

Boudin proposed that it should be put to the vote, and he questioned each doctor in his turn.

The king was greatly, painfully agitated ; his eye wandered from visage to visage of these solemn debators, as if they were supreme judges deciding upon the life of his beloved grandchild.

The grave manner and solemn looks of Boudin as he put the question to the conclave was more harrowing to the feelings than the keen, sharp colloquy of Doctors Maréchal and Fagon.

Boudin wrote down the reply of each ; four were of opinion that the malady was not the effect of poison ; six that it was.

Upon hearing the report the king arose, dismay and terror in his looks, and, addressing himself to Fagon and the other doctors who were of his opinion, said—

‘Gentlemen, I have every confidence in your skill, and in your professional science ; lose not a moment in making use of every remedy and antidote this dreadful case may require. And, gentlemen, it is my particular request and command that the result of this deliberation, may for the present be kept secret.

With slow step and downcast eye the afflicted king left the apartment, followed by Madame de Maintenon, whose eyes were suffused with tears.

All the Court anxiously awaited the issue of this solemn consultation.

The doctors paced solemnly through the lines of courtiers

who peered curiously into the grave visage of each as he passed, but not a question was asked ; probably they judged from the averted looks that the doctors would not have replied.

The fifth day of the dauphine's malady had now arrived. The danger appeared to increase.

The princess requested the succour of the Church. Her confessor, Père de la Rue, of the Society of Jesus, was introduced into her apartment.

The holy man desired to know if she was ready for the sacrament of penitence ? To this the princess made no reply. Father de la Rue renewed this question several times.

The confessor now divined the cause of her silence ; and he said with much tact and dignity, that on so solemn an occasion the general rule might be broken, and that she might make choice of any other confessor, without giving any offence.

The dauphine gave to De la Rue a look expressive of her gratitude ; and she faintly named M. Bailli, priest of the mission.

Father de la Rue instantly sent for him, but he had returned to Paris.

Another must now be chosen, and the princess named father Nöel, of the Order of the Recollets. He attended, and heard the confession of the Dauphine of France.

This event soon spread abroad, and each gave it his own interpretation. The most absurd was the most accredited.

In the evening the princess received extreme unction, for the doctors' opinion then was, *there was no hope !*

Then was heard sobs and groans in the magnificent palace of Louis XIV., where so lately reigned glory, mirth, and happiness.

The sad hour was come when they must bid an eternal adieu to the best of women, and most charming of princesses.

The mournful ceremony commenced.

The dauphin kneeled at the bedside, and wept upon the passive, half-cold hand which he held.

The poor old king was prostrate at the foot of the bed, praying with joined hands, and almost suffocated with his grief.

Madame de Maintenon and the princesses were kneeling, and in prayer, at the end of the chamber.

The princes kneeled behind the king ; the doorway and the adjoining saloon were crowded with pious assistants. All the attendant lords appeared to be overwhelmed with sadness.

The expiring princess, after having received the holy sacrament in feeble tones, thanked the king, the dauphin, and all the assistants ; tears and groans were the only reply.

Then the dauphin arose, and with despairing eye stretched out his hands towards heaven, as if to implore the Divine aid for the dying. Alas ! his prayer was heard, already the fatal shaft had sped ; and the unearthly expression of her features proclaimed that her spirit was about to pass into another world. Her pale visage stood in relief against the sombre tapestry like the head of a phantom.

The king cast his eyes upon her at this moment, and he trembled ; he had a terrible revelation as if from on high ; the mind of the princess became each moment more bewildered. The poor king could bear the harassing scene no longer. So, holding upon his grandson's arm for support, he dragged him out of the fatal chamber.

There only now remained with the dying princess the

doctors and two or three of her ladies. During the night the dauphine expired. This angel of grace and beauty had taken her flight towards heaven.

The next morning at seven o'clock they hurried the excited dauphin from Versailles.

Two hours later the king, followed by M. du Caylus, entered the funereal chamber to bid an eternal adieu to the earthly remains of his dear and lamented granddaughter. She seemed as if she slept upon her bier, surrounded by guardian seraphs.

Louis XIV remained for a quarter of an hour praying and mournfully contemplating her beloved visage, which he was never to see again ; then he threw holy water upon the royal bier, and, piously saluting the majesty of death, he took a last, a lingering look, and left the royal corse to the care of the attendants.

At the foot of the grand staircase, a carriage was in waiting to receive the king ; and there in the midst of the crowd he saw a young man, pale as the visage he had just been contemplating on her bier. Great tears were coursing each other down the cheeks of this young man.

At first Louis had but a confused recollection of his features, but suddenly his memory returned and he exclaimed—

‘ Ah ! is it thee ? Art thou there, my friend ? ’

Fronsac, for it was he, fell at his royal master’s feet ; the king raised him, whispered a few words in his ear, and then gave him his hand to kiss.

The emotion was too violent for the over-excited spirits of the poor duke, and he was borne away fainting.

The king departed for Marly.

The body of the dauphine of France was then placed in

the leaden coffin, cased with oak, over which was thrown a superb pall of blue velvet, embroidered with *fleur de lis* of gold, and at the angles four dolphins of gold shone brilliantly in this chamber of death, which was lighted by innumerable wax tapers.

Towards night the apartment was left to gloomy silence; all the Court had paid a last tribute of homage to their adored princess. No one remained in this chamber, but in an adjoining oratory a priest upon his knees prayed before its little altar. At intervals, his voice became more sonorous, letting some Latin words escape, and some fragments of verses for the office of the dead. This priest was leaning upon a *prie-dieu*, supporting his head with his hands. After many hours passed thus, he was seized with an irresistible lethargy, his eyelids were weighted down, he slept, and did not hear the slight noise caused by a private door opening with precaution; this door led to a narrow, winding staircase, through which a person might fly in case of need, and was constructed within the thickness of the wall. For the knowledge of this secret it was necessary to make a friend of one of the ladies of the household, and this was done by one of the most inconsolable and desolate of beings.

Recovered from his fainting fit, the young Duke de Fronsac determined to return to Paris, but almost as instantly changing his mind, as the night was falling he quitted his carriage, and returned to Versailles, and it required all his address to glide undiscovered to the private staircase which we have just described, before he ventured to open the secret door. He listened with attentive ear for some minutes.

No noise broke upon the silence of the funereal chamber.

He gently opened the door, and with stealthy step advanced ! The priest was on his knees with his back towards him ; he shortly felt convinced that the good ecclesiastic slept, and he thanked God from the bottom of his soul. Thanks to the carpet he could walk with noiseless step.

There lay the dead body of the dauphine, surrounded by tapers. Once more he beheld that pale countenance, those long, silken eyelashes, the yet smiling mouth ; an embroidered veil was fastened under her chin, her covered arms, from which fell immense white ruffles, were crossed upon her breast ; in her right hand she held a little crucifix of ebony, and in her left a bouquet of violets and everlastings—the flowers of the garden of death.

The young duke first tottered to the foot of the bier, and falling upon his knees there, he silently offered up his prayers and adorations. Taking up a corner of the regal pall, he bore it reverently to his lips ; then he arose, as if more assured by these acts of submission and respect, and turning about he ventured to fix his regards upon the adored figure, now so cold and motionless.

In his delirium he forgot that the pure soul had quitted its frail habitation, and joining his hands, he exclaimed—

‘ Oh, madame, to see you thus ! how have I offended you ? ’

Then suddenly, his reason returning, he covered his face and added—

‘ Pardon—oh, pardon me, angel of my life ! Alas ! she is dead ! Adieu, fond looks !—adieu, sweet smile !—farewell, that softest voice !—all—all is frozen, icy cold.’

Then he placed his knee upon a step of the elevation upon which the coffin was placed, and becoming more familiar with his grief, he gently raised a hand of the dead, and murmured with tearful eyes—

‘ Angelic spirit, I adore thee—my heart, my soul was thine, I have loved thee enthusiastically. My life was at thy disposal, and God is my witness that I would gladly pass the remainder of it here, at the foot of thy coffin, if they would consent to give thee to me now, cold and dead as thou art.’

And at these words he pressed the icy hand to his lips.

At this moment some one gently touched him upon the shoulder ; he started with surprise, and turning he beheld the grave but kind features of Doctor Fagon.

‘ My dear duke,’ said the doctor, in his mildest tone, ‘ why this useless grief ? ’

At the same time taking him by the arm to draw him away. Fronsac broke loose from him, and flew to kiss for the last time the marble hand, which, alas ! unconsciously held the bouquet of flowers. At this moment Fagon did not appear to notice the poor, disconsolate young man seize the violets and everlastings, and hide them in his breast.

‘ In the name of Heaven, come away, duke ! ’

‘ Yes, doctor, now. I am ready—dispose of me as you will,’ pressing fondly to his heart the funeral bouquet which his beloved dauphine had appeared to present to him as a last adieu.

The death of the dauphine was followed, in a few days, by that of the dauphin. Terrified France thought she saw in this the wrath of Heaven.

In the eyes of Europe the king was great in all this public and domestic trouble ; but in the intimacy of his old friends, he spoke of the fate of his beloved grandchildren with the tears of a breaking heart, and nothing

could console him for the loss of the dauphin and his dearly beloved granddaughter, the dauphine.

He granted to Fronsac his full pardon, and the king listened more to the debates of his family, and shortly afterwards Louis named the Duke de Fronsac aide-de-camp to Maréchal Villars. Fronsac, after fifteen days of delirious fever, slowly recovered. Some time after this he departed for the army, his mournful thoughts still dwelling on the sad parting interview with the beloved of his soul.

In after times he became a very brilliant man, and then a powerful and illustrious peer. But all the stormy passions which beset his chequered life could never extinguish the thought of his early love—that plaintive and tender note which vibrated upon his heart, that beloved phantom of the soul haunted his day-dreams, and often blessed him with its presence in his sleeping hours ; and to the end of his lengthened and glorious career the aged Duke de Richelieu still spoke of her, and revered her memory with tenderness.

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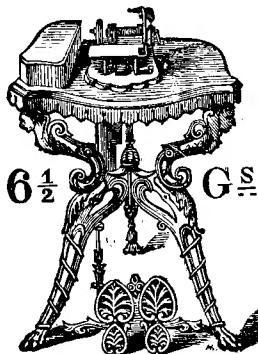
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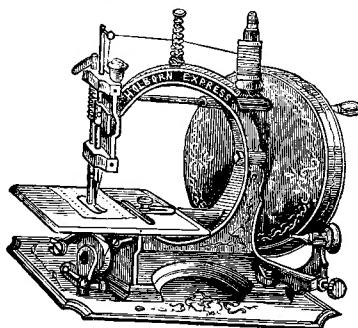
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